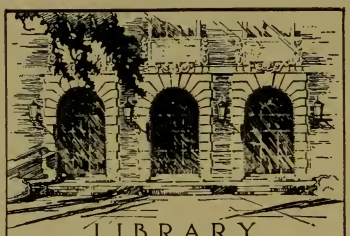

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GODDESSES THREE

GODDESSES THREE

A Novel

BY

D. HUGH PRYCE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1896

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GODDESSES THREE

PROLOGUE.

It was close upon midnight. The moon was sailing high in the cloudless sky, and the mountains were bathed in a flood of light. Down in the ravine, where the dark pine-forests grew, and climbed the rocky walls of the hills on either side, the shadows were intensely black; but on a precipitous rock that jutted out at the head of the valley, the Castle of Adlofstein stood clear of the woods, its massive towers sharply defined in the bright moonlight.

The summer night was perfectly still; not a breath of air was stirring in the pine-branches, and the silence was absolute; but it was broken suddenly—suddenly and terribly. From the castle on the height there came the sound of a

shot—the short, sharp crack of a pistol-shot—and the instant afterwards, a window high up in one of the turrets was thrown open, a light shone out, and a woman's agonized cry pierced far into the dead silence of the night.

That cry was the keynote of a tragedy ; and no one could have heard it without realizing its significance.

The hour was so late that the inmates of the house had, most of them, long been sunk in sleep, and the moonlight shone on the blank panes of the windows, from which all the lights had died out ; but in an oriel corresponding to the one from which the alarm had come, the yellow glow of artificial light was yet to be seen, and within this room a student sat reading by a shaded lamp. The young man, who was powerfully built, and of proportions so immense as to be almost Titanesque, was bending over a heavy, ancient-looking volume of dry-as-dust appearance, and he was completely absorbed in it—so completely as to have become entirely oblivious of the flight of time, and the waning light of the lamp in which the oil was getting low ; but at the sound of the pistol-shot he looked up with a start, and as the cry which succeeded it fell upon his ear, he sprang to his feet.

'Great Scott! what was that?' he exclaimed in the English language. 'Something has happened!'

He paused, listening intently; and through the window, the lattice of which was partly open, there came again that terrible cry—the heart-rending shriek of a woman calling for help. It came again and again, apparently from outside; but as it rose higher and higher, a dreadful thought flashed suddenly into the listener's mind. He dashed out of the room, and down the spiral stairs, then up again by another winding flight, and he did not stop until he reached the room from which the screams came. A gray-haired man-servant was before him, and was standing at the door, which he vainly tried to open.

'It is locked, Herr Baron,' said the old man, in a shaking voice. 'We cannot get in, and the Baroness is screaming so that she does not seem to hear. What can have happened?'

The younger man flung himself against the door with all the force of his immense size and strength.

'Unlock this door, or else I burst it open!' he called out in tones of command; and he was about to hurl himself for a second time against the straining oak, when the screams ceased

suddenly, and the key turned in the lock with a click.

The door was flung open, and the two men rushed in; but the sight which met their eyes as soon as they got in was one which caused them to fall back mute with horror.

A woman, in loose white draperies, and with fair hair streaming wildly all about her, had opened the door; and as they entered she stood, with madness in her eyes, pointing to the helpless figure of a man seated before a writing-table, with his arms resting upon a heap of papers, and his head fallen forward. A pistol, still smoking, lay on the table before him, and from his right temple trickled a thin red stream, that was slowly dropping on to the parqueted floor and forming a dark pool there.

'Look at him—look at him! See what he has done!' the unhappy woman cried, pointing shudderingly at the lifeless figure. 'Oh, help—help!' and, flying back to the open window, she continued to pour out her distracted shrieks for aid.

'*Gott in Himmel!*' ejaculated the old servant, 'the Herr Baron has shot himself, and the gracious lady has gone mad with grief and horror!'

It seemed to be the case. Baron Adlofstein was dead, and the young wife who had been the witness of the tragedy was utterly incapable of giving any explanation of it. For the time being, at any rate, she was evidently bereft of her senses, and her stepson signed to one of the panic-stricken domestics who had collected at the door to take her out of the room.

When she was gone, he turned to the other servants :

'Go!' he said sternly. 'Don't stand staring and groaning here, where you can do no good, but go and search every corner of the house. Search the gardens, and go down the valley, and spread the alarm, so that if a murderer has been here there may be no chance of escape for him. Go quickly! A thousand gulden to the man who finds him!'

The servants hurried away, all but one—the gray-haired old Kutscher, who had spent all his life in the service of Adlofstein.

'Herr Baron,' he said, 'this is not murder—the door was locked——'

'Yes—by the Baroness, after his escape. Why else should she have been so much afraid of opening the door? And there is the other door.'

The old retainer shook his head. The only

other entrance into the room was a door leading into the bedroom whence the Baroness had evidently rushed in the middle of her undressing; and the door into the corridor beyond was locked on the inside. He had gone into this inner room to ascertain that no one was there, and now he moved to the window. It was fifty feet at least from the ground, and underneath was a spiked railing running round a deep bastion—impossible that anyone could have escaped by the window.

'The gracious Lady Baroness may be able to tell us if an enemy has been here, when she comes to herself; but, ah! that will not be the explanation.'

'Then what is it? What do you suppose?'

The Baron, who had so suddenly and tragically become the head of the house of Adlofstein, stood by the side of his dead father—a tragic figure himself, with the impress of horror on his frowning brows, and a look of deep despair in his eyes. He looked at the man almost menacingly as he asked the question; but old Rudolf had known him from his boyhood, and he answered with the freedom of a privileged person.

'Pardon me, Herr Baron. It can only be one thing,' he said in an agitated but respectful

voice. 'The blow has fallen—the blow which falls always on the third generation. I hoped that it might have been averted ; but for a long time now I have noticed how melancholy the Baron has become, and I have feared—oh, I have feared ! All this time that you have been away in England, Baron Louis—oh, my master —my master—that it should have ended thus !'

He broke down suddenly, his sorrow and emotion completely getting the better of him ; but the young Baron stood over him with anger and indignation blazing in his eyes.

'You think that your master had become insane, and that he took his own life not knowing what he did—you dare to stand here and say that ? I tell you that it is a lie ! There was no man in Silesia more absolutely sane than my father.'

'But the curse, Herr Baron—the curse of Adlofstein—that shows itself always in the third and fourth generation——'

'It is a miserable superstition !' thundered the Baron. 'Let me never hear you mention it again. There is nothing in it ; it has died out long ago. As for my father, if ever you dare to say that this happened because his mind had given way, you will have me to reckon with. I shall be master here now, and

you know I will stand no trifling. I will permit no man to say that my father had fallen under that horrible curse.'

Rudolf was silenced. He knew well how potent were the reasons that led the young Baron to reject this explanation, but in his own mind there was no room for doubt, and he was filled with a horror to which the horror of the Baron's sudden death was as nothing.

'You will be saying next that I am mad, I suppose?' said the young man bitterly.

Rudolf looked at him with the tears rushing into his old eyes. He loved the son only less than the father, and his devotion to the family had been faithful and long-tried.

'Oh, Baron Louis! if it could be anything else—if it only could——'

'I tell you that it is! There is an explanation—there must be. If my father took his own life, he must have had a reason. He was not mad—he was as sane as you or I—but it is true that he has been melancholy for years. For six years he has had some horror hanging over him, and now the end has come. It is an American duel!'

'*Ach Gott!* an American duel!' said the old man, murmuring the dread words under his breath—'an American duel!'

'An American duel. That accounts for everything, and it is the explanation. There is none other.'

'But what enemy was there with whom the Freiherr could have had so awful a quarrel?'

'I do not know. But I can find out; and when I do find out, the man who fought in the dark with the father shall fight in the open day with the son. I swear that! Here, by the dead body of my father, I swear it. Now go, Rudolf—go and see if anything has been discovered. It is not likely, but we must omit no precaution. And if Karl has come back, let him saddle Satanella, and ride as fast as he can to Lindenthal to summon the police.'

Rudolf lingered a moment before obeying the order.

'Will you not come away, Baron Louis?' he said falteringly. 'It is so terrible for you to remain here. Will you not go downstairs to wait until the police come?'

'No; I wish to be alone with my father. Leave me.'

The old servant dared not remonstrate, and he went out, closing the door behind him.

Left alone in the chamber of death, the new Lord of Adlofstein stood motionless for some seconds by the side of the dead Baron.

His stern gaze was fixed upon the objects on the table—the candles still burning, the open inkstand, and the watch and chain propped up against it. A sheet of paper, with the well-known handwriting scarcely dry upon it, showed that the Baron had been about to write a letter; but he had got no further than the address and the date, and the words 'My dear,' and for whom the letter had been intended, or what it would have revealed, the son could now never know. He thought, as he looked at it, that it was possible enough that a farewell message to himself might have been in his father's mind; that he had sat down to write it before the hour of doom was reached in which he was bound to destroy himself, but that he had left it till too late.

It was almost exactly at midnight that the household had been roused by the fatal shot, and Adlofstein pictured to himself his father looking up from the letter which he found impossible to write, and seeing the fingers of the watch pointing to the inexorable moment, then dropping the pen to take up the pistol. The pen was close to the letter, but the pistol lay at some distance from it, and Adlofstein's first impression had been that its being so far away was evidence which precluded the theory

of self-destruction; but now he thought that it might have fallen or rolled from the failing clasp of the nerveless right hand to the place, a few inches to the left, where it lay. There was no longer any doubt in his mind as to the fact that it had been his father's own hand which had done the deed.

'It must have been so—it must have been so!' he said aloud with quivering lips; 'but there must have been some reason—there must! I will never believe that the shameful scourge that has been buried for so long could break out in him—never, never! Oh, my father!'

The emotion which he had sternly suppressed in the presence of onlookers broke through its bounds, and surged over him at last in overwhelming strength. As he looked at the wreck of the strong man who had been his father, and realized how inexorable and how irremediable was the stroke, the blank horror which had at first paralyzed every other sensation gave way to passionate grief, and the young man was shaken by an agony that could find no relief in tears.

'Oh, my father—my poor, poor father!' he groaned, the words wrung out of him by the extremest anguish. 'What you must have

suffered all these years, knowing that this inexorable fate was hanging over you! This, then, was the reason of that cloud of gloom and reserve which shadowed your spirit for so long, and I—I, who ought to have brightened your life, did but darken it more. I refused to forgive you for your second marriage, and I left you to go back to England. And now you lie there dead, and you will never know that all the time I loved you.'

The bitterest thought that can stab a loving heart was torturing Adlofstein then. The dissensions that had sprung up between him and his father had not been able to loosen the ties of an affection unusually close and strong; but they had caused an estrangement which had spoilt their old relations, and had never been entirely removed; and now it was too late. Too late! Are there any words sadder than those, when death has stepped in, and made blind and deaf to our heart's agonized cry the eyes and ears that we might have gladdened—and did not?

To Adlofstein it seemed that the only thing left for him to do for his father now was to clear his memory from the stain that would rest upon it, if it could be said that he had taken his life without reason. The only means of doing

this would be by proving that it had been an American duel, and this, monstrous as it may seem, would be no blot in the eyes of Austrian society. The difficulty would be to discover a clue. Adlofstein had none; and the quarrel might have had its origin years back in the past. A duel decided by a throw of the dice or the colour of a billiard-ball, and involving self-destruction to the loser, a year, two years, five years, sometimes even seven years later—this is the American duel as it is known in Austria, and it is a form of murder which is calculated to elude justice and vengeance alike; yet sometimes the truth comes out, and then retribution follows.

Adlofstein, mad with grief and indignation, knelt by the side of his dead father, and repeated the vow that he had made before:

'If I find out—if I can only find out—I will repay!'

CHAPTER I.

EVANGELA.

MAJOR AND MRS. DABLEY were philanthropists in the modern and accepted sense of the term, which in some people's minds is spelt with a big P.—in others with a big F; for where philanthropy appears in unmistakably clear characters to some eyes, others can only see faddism written big.

Whether the Dableys were philanthropists or faddists is open to question; perhaps they were both; but that they were most excellent, kind, and well-meaning people is undeniable. They toiled at the task of filling bottomless buckets, and they flung themselves with ardour into the mania of the day for cutting down good trees in order to prop up rotten ones; and they had the reward of good consciences, and lives full of occupation and interest. It is the philanthropist who flourishes like the green bay-tree

in the present generation, and if he chooses to exhaust all the goodness of the soil in order to afford an artificial shelter to the crop of puny weeds that grows under his shadow, who shall dare to say him nay? Certainly not the Ministers of a paternal Government.

The Dableys were philanthropists; but they were in a state of perpetual warfare with their neighbours, and they had quarrelled with all their relations. All, that is, except one, and he was a cousin, living in Wales, whom they had not seen for more than twenty years. They were reminded of him at last by an announcement that one day appeared in the papers.

'My dear,' said the Major, laying down the Radical and Socialistic sheet that was for the time being his totem and guiding light, 'Henry Wynne is dead!'

'Henry Wynne?' Mrs. Dabley repeated interrogatively.

'Don't you remember Henry Wynne? Oh, surely you do! That clever, brilliant cousin of mine. He took a high degree at Cambridge—Senior Wrangler—or was it Senior Optime?—I really can't remember quite what it was; but I know everyone expected great things of him, and, after all, he did nothing. He married

a foreign lady whom he met abroad, and settled down in a quiet country living in Wales.'

'Oh, I know now whom you mean,' said Mrs. Dabley. 'He went abroad as tutor to young Lord Deyncourt, and he fell in love with a beautiful Austrian girl—Countess something or other, wasn't she? They hadn't any business to marry, though, for neither of them had any money. I always thought it was a great mistake.'

'Well, I don't know. He waited until he had got the living, and five-and-twenty years ago that living was a good one. Now that tithes have fallen to three-fourths of what they were—and are generally not paid at all—of course the value of Welsh livings is considerably altered. I wonder if poor Henry has left any provision for his daughter? The wife died some years ago, I know; but he had a daughter—do you remember, you were struck by the child's name? What was it? Oh, I know—Evangela it was; and we wondered if it was a Continental form, or merely a fancy of Henry's. That girl must be nineteen or twenty now. I wonder what will become of her?'

'I will write and find out,' said Mrs. Dabley, and, acting on the kindly impulse, she wrote that same day.

The letter she received in reply was one that stirred all the real womanly kindness and compassion that was in her.

'Listen to me, Philip,' she said, after she had read to her husband the pathetic little note. 'This poor child is left an orphan, and quite alone in the world, with no means of support; and it is quite unfit for her to go out and earn her own living, as she talks of doing. Why shouldn't I have her here to cheer me up while you are all day at your meetings, or in your study? A little cheerful companionship would be good for us both, I am sure; and we should be able to offer a young girl many advantages. Yes, I know! We have had young girls before, and they turned out minxes, every one, and I said I would never have another; but with a relation it would be different. This seems really almost a duty.'

When Mrs. Dabley put something she wanted very much in the light of a duty, it meant nailing her colours to the mast; and the Major knew better than to oppose. He raised no objections now, and a letter was despatched inviting Evangela Wynne to come and make her home with her cousins in London.

Evangela came; and Mrs. Dabley fell in love with her at first sight. She was charmed with

her appearance, her manners, and her conversation. All that she did and said was exactly right, and she praised her to all her friends and acquaintances as an absolutely perfect character. Nothing was too good for her, and she was the most important person in the house. This lasted for four months, and then the inevitable reaction began to set in. The process of disenchantment had begun, and Mrs. Dabley became aware of some flaws in her paragon. She discovered that Evangela had an exceedingly strong will, and certain decided opinions of her own which did not in the least coincide with the code of the Dabley household. Also that she had a talent for argument, and an annoying habit of proving her point. She had received an unusual education for a girl, having been brought up to share the interests of an intellectual and highly cultivated man. From her mother she had learnt French and German so as to be able to speak and write both languages with ease and fluency, and with her father she had read Virgil and Horace, Thucydides and Plato, besides all the books on history and political economy, and the essays and reviews in which he was interested. The effect of all this was to make Evangela unusually thoughtful and well-read for her age, and though she had

no 'views,' and was singularly free from conceit, her mind had received a stamp from her readings of Herbert Spencer and the *Saturday Review*, which was the occasion of deep distress and concern to Major and Mrs. Dabley. Aunt Anastasia, as Evangela was told to call Mrs. Dabley, was no match for her in argument, and she was usually driven to wind up a discussion with some such remark as this :

'Well, my dear, you think so now, but perhaps when you are older you will know better.'

Mrs. Dabley had a very dignified way of shutting up people who did not agree with her, but though Evangela was too well-bred and sweet-tempered to make the obvious retort which suggested itself, a twinkle would come into her eyes on these occasions, which had as much power to annoy her aunt; and for the whole day afterwards Mrs. Dabley would put a restraint upon herself to mete out strict justice and politeness to the offender. If there was one thing upon the possession of which Mrs. Dabley particularly prided herself, it was a conscientious sense of justice, and a firm control of temper; but it was precisely this that made her displeasure the dreadful thing that it

was, and Evangela, who was both proud and sensitive, suffered considerably under it.

One afternoon in August a climax came. It had been an intolerably hot day, and both Mrs. Dabley and Evangela were worn out after a long day's shopping. When they came in for tea, Mrs. Dabley found fault with the vigorous manner in which Evangela stirred her tea. It was an unlady-like habit, she said ; and upon this text she took occasion to preach her young cousin a sermon which relieved her feelings not a little. Evangela listened resignedly, surprised that anyone should attach importance to such trifles, but not thinking it worth while to enter into a dispute. Mrs. Dabley liked to hear the sound of her own voice, and there was nothing she enjoyed more than making out a case. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens with orators in other and wider arenas, she was carried away by her own eloquence to say a good deal more than she either felt or meant, and she was soon drawing up a sort of bill of attainder against Evangela. She mentioned every point of difference that had arisen between them from the very beginning, even including a dissimilarity of opinion as to the becomingness of a ribbon which had been bought that afternoon. She enumerated all the little tiny grievances

that had annoyed her, such as Evangela's way of doing her hair, and the length of time she took in going to bed ; and then she dwelt on the sacrifices and inconveniences that she and the Major had incurred in order to offer her a home—'As we were very glad to do, my dear,' she added, 'and should have done had there been twice as many difficulties in the way.'

She was really a kind-hearted woman, and had no intention of wounding the feelings of the young girl who was dependent upon her generosity ; but she could not resist the temptation of telling her that but a few days ago she had heard of a paragon of a young lady who understood the mysteries of dress-cutting, and was strongly recommended by the Honourable Mrs. Pomeroy ; but of course, she said, she had never dreamt of entertaining the idea for an instant, and had not given the matter a second thought, even though it might have saved her half of her dressmaker's bills, and Madame Delaine was getting most outrageously dear, besides being utterly unsatisfactory in every other respect.

Evangela listened without a word while Mrs. Dabley ran on, setting forth all that she and her husband had done for her, and implying that she did not show the gratitude that she

owed. The girl made no answer, but she had inherited pride from both sides of her family, and her heart seemed on fire. It was only a few months since she had been driven, as though by a flaming sword, out of a home which seemed to her now like a lost Paradise, and the trouble of the moment brought back all her pain with sharper stings than ever. She had idolized her father, and now that she had lost him, she felt all alone and desolate in a world where there was no place for her. She was not so unreasonable as to forget all the kindness that her cousins had lavished upon her because of a few inconsiderate words, but she felt instinctively that it was no home for her, and that nothing but irritation and disappointment could come of her staying on. From the Divine Right of Kings to the Divine Right of imposing total abstinence; from the reasonings of Sir Henry Maine to the theories of the anti-opiumists—it was an impossible transition, and Evangela felt that even if she were to determine to hold her peace and suffocate, she would still fail to satisfy her cousins.

'I must go!' she said half aloud—'but where?'

She had made her escape from the drawing-room into the little strip of blackened London

garden at the back of the house, and her eyes were full of tears. They were pretty eyes—large and soft and very dark, with long curling lashes of jetty black—and when they smiled they brimmed over with fun; but now their brightness was clouded.

'Where shall I go?' she repeated. 'What is to become of me?'

The sound-waves, caused by her softly-uttered words, floated out among the withering roses in the smoky garden, and were lost. There came no answer to her question; but, all unknown to her, a solution of her difficulties was at hand, and it was winging its way to her from an unexpected and distant source. It arrived the next morning in a perfectly prosaic way—by post.

An unusual thing happened on that particular morning—two unusual things, indeed—for Evangela was not down to prayers, and there were no letters for the Major. Since his enforced retirement from the army, Major Dabley had found occupation for an unusually active mind in constituting himself secretary and pamphleteer to all sorts of strange societies, and he was, in consequence, inundated with correspondence as a rule; but on this particular morning there were only two letters handed in

—one for Mrs. Dabley, and the other for Evangela; for the Major there was nothing.

Mrs. Dabley opened and read her letter as soon as family prayers were over; but Evangela had not yet come down, and her letter lay on the breakfast-table by the side of her plate. It was a foreign letter, and it was rather remarkable in appearance—the address being written in violet ink in a large, sloping handwriting, while on the flap of the envelope was stamped a gilt coronet with seven points.

The Major's mind, abhorring a vacuum, immediately began to occupy itself with surmises as to the history and contents of this unusual-looking missive, and he would have liked to have aired his opinions on the point; but an instinct, begotten of sad experience in the past, warned him that to do so would be to court a little set speech from his wife on the folly and unprofitableness of idle speculation, and he refrained.

Mrs. Dabley was absorbed in her own letter, which was from the honourable patroness of the dress-cutting young lady. It consisted of many sheets setting forth the virtues and accomplishments of this paragon, and it informed dear Mrs. Dabley, in case there should now be a vacancy in her happy home-circle, that the

young lady was still available. Mrs. Dabley sighed a little as she put the epistle down ; but she made a noble resolve that she would keep her own counsel in the matter, and felt sustained by the consciousness of her own virtue.

'Evangela is late,' observed the Major, still eyeing the foreign letter curiously through his glasses as he took his place at the bottom of the table. 'I hope and trust, my dear, that she will not get into a habit of it. She must be made to understand that in a busy house like this, punctuality is a necessary virtue.'

'Yes, dear,' replied Mrs. Dabley, with composure. 'This is the first time in the whole six months that Evangela has been with us that she has come down late, and if it occurs as seldom as that I don't think you will have much cause for complaint. The marvel to me is that she should be able to get up at all in the morning, considering how late she is in going to rest. She burns out her candle every night, and is seldom in bed until one or two o'clock.'

Mrs. Dabley, who was stout and fair, and a great contrast to her dark, lanky husband in personal appearance, had a staid, deliberate manner, that seemed like the effect of habitual repression in herself of the traits that she observed in the Major ; and she always spoke in

a low, measured voice, getting over the disadvantage of breathlessness from which she suffered by running off her long, impressive utterances with extreme precision and emphasis.

'My dear Anastasia!' ejaculated the Major, raising his eyebrows until they were almost lost in the wrinkles of his forehead. 'My dear Anastasia! That is a shocking habit! I hope you will put a stop to it.'

'What can I do?' inquired Mrs. Dabley calmly. 'Of course, I don't approve of it any more than you do, and I spoke to Evangela about it as soon as I discovered it; but she only smiled, and said very sweetly that she knew it was a bad habit, but that she could not help it. Again and again I have remonstrated, but, though she is quite good-tempered about it, she does not pretend to think that there can be any possibility of amendment.'

'Why don't you tell her that with the price of the candles she wastes some unemployed workman might be assisted to maintain his starving family?' demanded the Philanthropist.

'I did; and then she said that if she used less candles she would be contributing to throw out of work those men who are employed in making candles, and that it was better to spend your money in paying for work done than to

scatter it in indiscriminate charity that could only have a pauperizing effect. She said something about the inevitableness of unproductive labour in a highly-civilized and over-populated community—I forget how she put it, but I know that she somehow made out that she was doing a highly creditable and benevolent action in burning out her candles.'

'Ah, those inhuman principles of political economy!' said the Major, with a sigh; 'how has she become imbued with them? I must give her Henry George to read—he will soon convince her! What does she do that keeps her up so late at night, do you suppose, Anastasia? Does she read?'

'I fancy so. I know she keeps Greek and Latin books in her room, and I don't know what other time she can have for studying them. I am afraid, you know, my dear Philip, that we have not been *quite* so fortunate in Evangela as we thought at first.'

'My *dear* Anastasia!' exclaimed the Major in dismay, 'you were so delighted with her; you said she was so superior—don't you remember? You are surely not turning against her?'

'Certainly not, Philip!' replied his wife, with severe dignity. 'When have you ever known

me turn against anybody—as you put it—except for good and sufficient reason? I have no complaint to make about Evangela—at any rate, I make none. I say nothing, but—well, we shall see! I hope you will remain as content with her as you are at present—that's all!'

It was enough. Mrs. Dabley was the real ruler in that household, and sooner or later the Major was sure to give in to her views. The breath of her favour had set strongly in one direction for six months; but now the wind had shifted, and, true to the instincts of a weather-cock, the Major began to veer.

'I was certainly surprised that Evangela should not have taken more interest in my booklet upon the horrors of the opium traffic,' he remarked thoughtfully after a pause; 'I don't believe that she read it through.'

'I don't know, I am sure,' answered Mrs. Dabley, to whom this offence—one of the most grievous that can be committed against an author—did not appear in such a very serious light; 'I dare say she didn't. It's pretty long, and the last part, where it goes to the influenza arising from the consumption of opium in China, and coming on to us as a justly-merited scourge, is a little difficult to understand——'

'Why, that is the most powerful part of it

all!' exclaimed the author, justly aggrieved. 'Now, I'll just explain to you——' And, laying down his knife and fork, he walked to the hearth-rug, though there was no fire burning on that hot August morning, and placed himself in lecturing position—his legs wide apart, his head thrown back, one hand behind his coat-tails, the other extended, with the fore and middle finger sticking out prong-wise to point the moral.

'Oh, I know—I know,' interrupted Mrs. Dabley hastily. 'My dear Philip, you've explained it to me a hundred times, and if I don't understand it now, I never shall. But I was telling you about Evangela—did you hear what she said about vivisection? She said that if experiments tried upon human beings in the theatre of a hospital were not called vivisection, she did not see why experiments upon animals should be, and she wouldn't mind the destruction of a hundred rabbits if it would save risk to one human life that she cared about. Now, I call that a shocking sentiment to proceed from a young girl's mouth.'

'Did she really say that?' said the Major, in a sorrowful tone of voice. 'Then, I must have a talk with her about it. I think when the thing is put clearly and fairly before her, the

iniquity of it will not fail to strike her young and tender heart.'

'I doubt it,' remarked Mrs. Dabley calmly. 'There is no harm in your trying, of course. You can try; but I shall be very much surprised if you succeed in convincing her. When you want to impress a thing upon Evangela, she takes to arguing, and then, before you know where you are, you will find that she has got you in a corner. It is a very unpleasing trait in a young lady, I consider, this passion for arguing. I suppose she gets it from her father. I have noticed that it amounts almost to a vice in many of your people.'

'Poor Henry!' said the Major. 'I don't know that he was specially addicted to arguing. There was a good deal of quiet humour about him, though; and Evangela's way of putting things often reminds me of him. She isn't like him in appearance, though.'

'No. I should imagine she took more after her mother. Her very dark eyes and hair give her a foreign look, and many people have asked me what nationality she is.'

'I see that letter is from Austria,' remarked the Major, seizing the favourable opening; 'and I suppose it must be from some of her relations over there.'

'I didn't know that any connection had been kept up,' began Mrs. Dabley, but she broke off short as a rapid footstep was heard outside, and Evangela came into the room.

She came peeping round the door—a slender figure in a closely-fitting black dress; a small, very fair face, with great dark eyes and delicate features. Under her eyes were dark circles for which her nightly readings were responsible, and the prettiness of her face was eclipsed as much by the intellect and character of its expression as by its wanness and pallor, but just now it was lighted up with a smile of deprecation and penitence so sweet and winning that it might have disarmed the severest critic.

'This is shocking—atrocious, isn't it? Dear Aunt Anastasia, do scold me, and then perhaps I shall feel better. I'll never, never do it again—till next time! Oh, who *can* this be from?'

She had taken up her letter, which was covered all over with postmarks and re-directions, and was turning it over and over in her hands.

'You will save time if you open it, and look at the signature,' remarked Mrs. Dabley, in her impressive tone of superior common-sense. 'It is probably from one of your relations abroad.

Your uncle and I were just wondering how they could have found you out.'

Evangela opened her letter, and hastily glanced through it.

'It is signed Melanie de Bertemilian,' she said wonderingly. 'I never heard of her before; but she says her mother was a cousin of mamma's. She writes very kindly and warmly, and she asks me to go and stay with them. But you had better read the letter. It is partly in French and partly in English. Will you read it, Aunt Anastasia, or shall I read it aloud to you?'

'Oh, read it out, by all means,' said the Major. 'And you may as well translate the French part as you go along, for my benefit, if not for your aunt's. I expect both of us have got rather rusty in our French.'

In compliance with this appeal, Evangela read aloud:

'Lindenthal,
'Oestereichische Schlesien.

'"My dear Cousin Vangela!" (Such an immense note of admiration!' commented Evangela).

'But why does she call you Vangela?' asked

Mrs. Dabley, interrupting. 'You said Vangela, didn't you?'

'Yes,' answered Evangela, in a suddenly softened tone. 'Mamma used always to call me Vangela, so it sounds familiar to me; but I don't know how this lady has got hold of it.'

'Well, go on,' said the Major, and Evangela continued:

'"The sorrowful tidings of your dear father's death, which have come to reach me, have caused to me a profound sadness and sympathy for you, and I empress myself to write to you to offer my sincere condolence. Ah! it is a terrible thing to lose a parent. I, who write, know it well, for there is only a year that our dear mamma is taken from us, and we are still desolated.

'"But you will without doubt ask yourself, Who is this who writes me? Well, then, my dear, I must introduce myself. I am Melanie de Bertemilian, and my mother was a Merodynska, and a cousin through the Polish side to your dear mother. So, you see, we are parents!"'

'Parents?' interrupted Major Dabley.

'Relations she means,' said Evangela, smiling, and she went on reading:

'"We have heard of you from our friend, Thérèse de Potorska, who comes to return from England, and brings us your news. She heard by chance a mention of your name, which is the same as our mother's grandmother, our great-grandmother, who came from Venice, and then she inquired, and found out all. And now, my dear, it is time that I make the supplication of which I write you. Will you come and make us a visit for a year? My sister Thekla and I are very anxious to improve in our English, which is now the language the most *chic* that one speaks at Court. We have learnt a little from our Hanoverian governess, but very little, and bad, as you see.

'"Now, if you would desire to perfect yourself in German or French, Thekla and I will gladly give you instructions in return of English lessons. We live very retired here, and see very little world; but we will welcome you as a sister, and make you every pleasure and advantage we can, that you may enjoy your visit, and profit of it. Now, my dear, think well, and do not refuse my proposal. It will be so charming if you will come! Thekla and I long to have your acquaintance, and to introduce you to our friends. My father begs me to present his compliments, and to say how happy

he would be to see you ; and he begs that you will allow him to lay at your feet all expenses of travelling, etc. My sister Thekla also begs me to send you heart's greeting, and, assuring you of my perfect consideration,

'"I am, your devoted

'"MELANIE DE BERTEMILIAN."'

Evangela's eyes were dancing when she finished.

'Isn't it a pretty letter?' she said. 'So quaintly expressed, and yet so gracefully and kindly—she must be a warm-hearted girl;' and she looked up to see what impression had been made upon her uncle and aunt.

The Major was not remarkable for quickness of perception, and he looked utterly blank ; but Mrs. Dabley had all a woman's faculty for arriving instantly at a conclusion, and she saw at once that, if she wanted her lessons in dress-cutting, here was her opportunity. She paused a moment for consideration, and then she took breath for a weighty speech.

'It is a pretty letter,' she said graciously. 'You are right there, Evangela ; and it is possible that the proposal may be worth your acceptance. Of course, we must do nothing without due consideration and inquiry ; but if

you fancy it, a year abroad might be a pleasant experience for you, and it will be an advantage to you to improve yourself in French and German. However well you know a language, it is always well to be able to say that it has been acquired abroad. It sounds so well in an advertisement. We must talk it over.'

Not much breakfast was taken by Evangela that day—nor, indeed, much luncheon or dinner; but of talking over, there was enough. All day long the subject was discussed, and the next day and the next, until Evangela's patience was quite worn out. She had come to her decision, and had made up her mind to carry it out, before she had got to the end of the second reading of the letter; but she found that it would be expedient to smother her own enthusiasm if she wished to gain her end without opposition.

'Of course,' said Mrs. Dabley, 'we shall miss you very much, and it is a little hard on us to lose you just when you have got into our ways, and we have got so much attached to you; but, of course, we should not like to stand in the light of your best interests, and if these Bertemilians prove to be satisfactory sort of people, I think there can be no doubt that it would be right for you to accept their offer.

Your uncle must write to the British Embassy at Vienna, and find out all about them.'

Evangela could not be so unkind as to deprive her uncle of so keenly appreciated an opportunity of exerting his energies as this, and the letter was written and despatched; but she was in no doubt as to the course that she intended her answer to take, and long before the Consul's reply had arrived she had written her letter of acceptance, and set about her preparations.

The report from Vienna, when it came, proved satisfactory. It was nothing more than a short official statement that Baron Bertemilian was a man of good family and position; but this was all that Major and Mrs. Dabley could require, and the matter was settled. In a week's time Evangela received a letter from her cousin, answering her questions as to what necessary things she ought to bring, and within six weeks from the day when the invitation had reached her, Evangela had left England, and was tossing on the night-boat between Queensborough and Flushing, on her way to her unknown friends.

Major Dabley had suggested the propriety of his accompanying her to escort her on her journey; but this would have involved the

sacrifice of two tickets for a musical festival that Mrs. Dabley had taken, and, seeing her aunt's annoyance at this prospect, Evangela assured them that she could perfectly well go alone. Mrs. Dabley applauded this decision with much energy and determination.

'It is quite right,' she said decisively—'*quite* right that a girl in Evangela's position, who will have, to a certain extent, to make her own way in the world, should be independent of escorts, and all that sort of thing. To gain self-reliance and practical capability, there is nothing like being obliged to judge and act for yourself from the beginning.'

The Major had therefore to content himself with seeing Evangela off from the docks, and this he did with much fuss and zeal. It was past midnight before he reached home, but he found his wife still up, and eager to talk over the departed guest.

'Did she seem at all upset when you said good-bye to her?' asked Mrs. Dabley. 'She did not cry?'

'Oh no!' replied the Major, who was a somewhat superficial observer; 'she didn't show the least inclination to cry. I thought she was wonderfully bright and cheerful.'

'H—m!' said Mrs. Dabley; 'she didn't shed a tear when she parted from me, either.

I am sure I cried like anything, and for half an hour afterwards, too; but, then, I always had a tender heart. As for Evangela, I declare to you that I have never once seen a tear in her eyes during the whole time she has been here. I suppose the fact is that she has not got any to shed. She is a curious girl, and I don't profess to understand her. I think she is rather hard—oh, I don't mean that she is ungrateful! She thanked us prettily enough for the furs and things that we gave her, and I know she meant what she said, every word; but she is hard to please; she is critical of everything and everybody, and she is inclined to judge too severely. Now, Philip, of course she is a very good, sweet girl—did I ever say she was not? She is also very sensible, and clever, and accomplished, and all that, but she is not like other girls; that is what I complain of. She is somehow or other conspicuous—not to say odd—and I must say that I think that a drawback. A girl should never be conspicuous.'

In that respect Miss Mills was likely to prove a refreshing change after Evangela. She arrived the next day, and her personality was unexceptionably commonplace. She agreed with everything that everybody said, and Mrs. Dabley was delighted. She said she had not known what real rest and peace was for months.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE afternoon sunshine of the autumn day was flooding with a mellow light that grew every moment more golden a fertile, far-reaching plain; and Evangela, speeding to a point where a distant chain of mountains rose on the horizon, was approaching the end of her long railway journey.

For two days and nights she had been travelling steadily eastward (only stopping for those few hours that were absolutely necessary for rest and refreshment) through the wide plains of Belgium, where the red-tiled farm-houses and an occasional avenue of trees are the highest points that break the dead level of cultivated land; on into Germany, where plots of fertile ground, laid out with as much care as in a garden, alternate with long reaches of barren sand; on through interminable stretches

of pine-plantations, acres and acres of baby pines no bigger than cabbages, succeeded by acres and acres of small trees; these again by gloomy forests intersected by straight avenues that stretch away to vanishing-point; then through deserts of sand and stubbed-up roots, on, on, into the fertile plain of Prussian Silesia, which Frederick the Great filched from Austria in the hour of Maria Theresa's necessity. And now at last the mountains which form Austria's boundary on the north were rising into sight through the golden haze on the southern limit of the plain, and Evangela neared her destination.

She was desperately weary, and her natural pallor was so much increased by fatigue that the contrast between her dark hair and eyes and the waxen whiteness of her face was almost startling; but her eyes were alight with expectation, and she was too much excited to feel fatigue. The last station was passed; at the next stoppage she would see—whom? what? She sprang up from her seat, too restless to sit still, and paced from side to side of the rocking carriage, in the most intense excitement and expectation.

'Whatever it may be like, I must be content to make the best of it,' she said to herself. 'I

must not fail again. Aunt Anastasia and Uncle Philip were very kind, but I was a failure in their house, and though the fault must have been chiefly mine, I can never, never go back to live with them again. If I fail to satisfy these people, what home is there in the world for me? It will show that there is some fault in me that makes me unable to get on with strangers. Oh, father, father! those old happy times are gone for ever, and your little daughter feels very lonely and forsaken in this cold, hard world of strangers.'

The train slackened speed, and amongst two or three people standing on the platform of the little roadside station that they steamed slowly into, Evangela singled out at once a young lady whose look of distinction and dress of simple elegance made her noticeable. She was gazing expectantly into the carriage windows as the train came in, and her eyes met Evangela's. When Evangela got out, the young lady came straight up to her.

'I am Melanie de Bertemilian, and I think you must be my cousin Vangela,' she said in French with a charming smile; and as she looked into the brown eyes beaming with friendliness and kindness, Evangela experienced a reassuring sense of relief and thankfulness.

'What a fascinating face!' she thought, 'and how pretty! That fair hair with those large, bright, brown eyes, that clear olive skin, and full red lips; then that perfect Grecian line of nose and forehead. Why, she is beautiful!'

Evangela had leisure for making observations while the subject of them was looking after her baggage at the Custom-house. The young lady spoke to the German officials there with hauteur and stateliness, and she was evidently annoyed by the inexorableness of the inspection. She stood by chafing, while they rummaged in the boxes with ruthless hands, and the contempt and dislike with which she spoke of 'the Prussian pigs,' as she drove with Evangela out of the station, was to the English girl the first indication of that bitterness of feeling between Austrians and Prussians which is especially noticeable on the straitened frontier of Silesia. The station of Zeltenweg was on the German side of the border, and as Evangela saw that her cousin considered herself in the enemy's country, she thought with a thrill of patriotic satisfaction of the waves upon waves of blue water which were such a sure wall of defence to her own country.

'Look,' said Melanie; 'see there, my dear, where those poles mark the frontier line. Now

you are in Germany, but now—ah, now!—you are in Austria!'

The horses were gallantly breasting a rocky ascent, and at the side of the road at the top were two tall poles placed side by side, and painted with spirally winding stripes: the one on the German side black and white, the other black and yellow.

It was a desolate, treeless spot; but the view that it commanded was simply glorious. High snow mountains and pine-fringed peaks, dark forests and sunny valleys, were all irradiated with the golden light of the setting sun; and the snow peaks in the south were glowing rose in the reflection of the magnificent fires in the western sky.

'Ah!' said Evangela, drawing a long breath. 'This, then, is Austria. It seems to me an enchanted land. You have got the beauty on your side, Melanie!'

She withdrew her dazzled gaze from the panorama before her to look at the softly-rounded face at her side. That, too, was pink-flushed in the sunset glow; but it was lighted up as well by a glow from within—a fire of enthusiasm and vivacity more intense than Evangela had ever seen in any face before. The brown eyes were shining and sparkling,

the red lips parted in a smile that showed an absolutely perfect set of teeth—the whole face animated into almost startling brilliancy.

'Yes, my dear,' she cried, putting out both her hands, and taking Evangela's in a warm clasp. 'Yes, you have left Germany and dulness and ugliness behind you, and now you are in our beautiful Austria, your mother's country. I am so glad that you like it!'

The irritation which she had evinced at the station had passed away almost as soon as it had arisen, and she gave herself up with childlike enthusiasm to the delight of welcoming this new-found cousin and friend to the country of her adoption.

'Oh, my dear,' she said, pressing Evangela's hand, 'I cannot tell you how Thekla and I have looked forward to this day! We have talked of nothing else since the plan was proposed, and last night neither of us could sleep a single wink. Poor Thekla made herself quite ill with anticipation, and that is why she does not come to meet you. It is always the way with her before every pleasure, every party. She thinks so much of it beforehand that she is quite sick when the time comes! But now you are come and we shall be so happy. We have been so lonely and sad, poor Thekla and I. There

have been so many troubles since poor mamma died. I must tell you all. Oh, my dear, how much I have to tell you!'

This was true indeed; and when Melanie had once begun, she went on with the eloquence of a true *raconteuse*. It was ten miles from Zeltenweg to the town of Lindenthal—ten miles of such scenery as Evangela had never been through, even in her dreams, before—and during the long drive Melanie took the opportunity of enlightening her cousin as to many things that were strange and new to her.

The moon climbed up the eastern sky, shining brighter and brighter, as the sunset faded out of the west, and in its cold and silvery light the pine-forest through which the carriage passed had an almost weird picturesqueness. The carriage-road, broad and well kept as any highroad in England, differed from English roads in having no wall or fence on either side, and Evangela had a vague romantic sense of delight in the perception that, without any real danger of an adventure, here was the fit setting for some romantic incident. Here, at a sharp corner of the road, was a huge buttress of rock towering out of the hanging woods, and from its barren crest sprang a tall, straight-stemmed young pine-tree, which was a

marvel of grace and beauty. A little further on, a few stumpy white posts marked a spot where a precipice fell steeply away from the road; and down in a gorge, at least a hundred feet below, a little stream tossed and tumbled, the foaming water glittering like silver in the moonlight. There was the mouth of a deep ravine, black as night in the forest; there a sharp mountain ridge, fringed to the top with feathery pines, that stood out dark and distinct against the clear evening sky.

It was all new and strange and wonderful to Evangela, and not less new and wonderful was the conversation of the fascinating companion who sat by her side. Evangela, with a reticence which was a part of her character, had not said a word about herself, and the open-hearted cordiality and undoubting confidence with which Melanie came to meet her, puzzled and surprised her at first; but she could not help being pleased, then touched, then altogether charmed; and as she looked at the brilliant face in the dark setting of the moonlit woods, she felt strangely drawn towards her.

They had reached the wildest and most beautiful depths of the woods, and a ray of moonlight falling through the pine-trees had revealed in Melanie's face a sudden change of

expression that was even more attractive than the glow of sparkling life that had animated it before. She had been talking delightedly of all the pleasures and amusements to which she and Thekla meant to introduce Evangela, when all at once, as she was speaking of the society about Lindenthal, her voice faltered, and she broke off short.

'Are you very fond of society and gaiety, Vangela?' she asked wistfully.

'I don't know,' answered Evangela in surprise. 'No; I don't think so. At least, I know I can do very well without it. I am not accustomed to it.'

'Not in London?' asked Melanie incredulously.

'Well, I didn't go out so very much in London; and I was only in London for nine months. Before that I had lived all my life in a quiet country parish in Wales, and there was no society at all there.'

'Ah, then perhaps you will not mind so much—I hope you will not mind—but, still, I think you ought to have been told. Dear Vangela!' she said appealingly, and Evangela saw that there were tears shining in her great brown eyes, 'there is one thing that I think you ought to know before entering our family,

and I wish to tell you at once, so that you may be able to understand our position. It is a great trouble which hangs over us like a cloud, and I felt I ought to have told you about it in my first letter; but my father would not hear of it, and he is so sensitive about this matter that I could not bear to press it; also he had reason when he said that from a letter you could never understand. But now I will tell you, and I know your kind heart will sympathize, and you will be sorry for us.'

Evangela took the little gloved hand that was held out to her, and pressed it warmly. What was this that she was going to hear?

'Two years ago,' said Melanie, 'we were all so happy—ah, so happy!—and we were all together. Our dear mamma was still with us, and there was no thought of trouble. We had lived here all our lives, and we loved the place. We had so many friends and acquaintances, and we paid many visits. Also at Vienna papa had a large circle, and we went there in the winter and had much pleasure. Thekla was too young, but I went out with mamma; and, ah, how delightful it was! But it ended too soon. One day, after we had returned home from the Carnival at Vienna, and my father had renewed his duties in his Bezirk, a quarrel

arose between him and the Baron Adlofstein, who is a neighbour of ours, and who lives in his old castle about half an hour from Lindenthal. Lent was over, and it was already the beginning of summer, and so hot that it was necessary to enforce the order for muzzling all dogs ; but the Baron Adlofstein took no notice of the order, and appeared all the days walking on the Platz with his two little white Spitz dogs —very snappy little beasts—unmuzzled. Papa was obliged, in pursuance of his duty, to send a notice to the Baron, that if he continued to disregard the order he would be fined ; and to this he returned only an insolent answer. In the end he was fined, and, when he met my father at the Casino afterwards, he said all disagreeable and insulting things he could think of ; and when my father resented it, he sent him a challenge. Ah, my dear, you smile! but it is no smiling matter in this country. If a man fights a duel, he must lose his position in the army and the Civil Service—it is the Emperor's will ; so whether he lives or dies, it is certain ruin. Yet if he refuses, and that is publicly known, that is ruin, too—ruin to his reputation. Never, never shall I forget the misery of those days ! We cried, mamma and I, until we were nearly blind. Papa was in an

agony. If he fought, he must lose all, and bring us to beggary; if he refused, he would be giving all men the right to insult him, and call him coward. He was nearly mad, but in the end mamma's tears prevailed, and he sent a refusal. Then—ah, then, my dear Evangela! —I cannot tell you how dreadful was what followed! That Adlofstein publicly branded my father as a coward, and took every possible occasion of insulting and persecuting him. Our friends turned away from us; no one any longer asked us to their houses, no one came to see us—oh, it was miserable, miserable!'

'But what an atrocious thing!' cried Evangela indignantly. 'Do you mean to say that anyone would care what a man like that might say or do? Why, he must be a madman!'

'I don't think he is mad—at least, not yet; but he may become so, for there is certainly madness in his family. Only a few months before this quarrel occurred the old Baron Adlofstein died by his own hand. He had suffered from melancholia for years, and though there was some mystery about it—and of course it could never be an absolute certainty—nobody has any doubt that it was a case of suicide. On that night the Baroness became mad, raving mad; and though she has partially recovered,

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she is very strange still, and no one dares to speak to her of her husband's death. Now the son grows gloomier and gloomier every year, and it is very likely that he will end like his father.'

'And yet a man like that could have power to spoil your father's life! It seems incredible!' exclaimed Evangela.

Melanie sighed, and her lips quivered.

'He has spoilt all our lives,' she said. 'You do not know what misery we have had to endure because of him. My poor mother!—never shall I forget her face when she said: "Thank God that we have no sons!" If we had had brothers, and they had been in the army, it is too terrible to think what would have happened.'

'Perhaps then,' said Evangela quietly, 'this man would never have dared to act as he did. Bullies are generally cowards.'

'Adlofstein is not a coward,' said Melanie. 'He is a splendid swordsman and an unerring shot, and all the world is afraid of him. He knows that, and he has used his power to cut us off from all our friends. Some few stood by us still, and braved public opinion by associating with us in spite of what had occurred; but they received notice from Adlofstein that

if they continued intimate with us they would incur his enmity. He threatened to send a challenge to more than one person who continued to visit at our house; and as we knew that he was quite capable of doing it, and we could not wish others involved in the same trouble as ourselves, we were compelled to let our friends go. For a year we lived like hermits, never going out except into the forest, and receiving no one. It killed poor mamma. She would never go out at all; and she drooped and drooped, until in about a year after the quarrel began she died. Since then we have been in mourning. So you see, dear Evangela, it is true what I said, that we live very quietly, and see little of the world. Therefore it will be such a happiness to Thekla and me, who have been so lonely, to have a friend. You will not regret that you have come?'

'Indeed I do not,' answered Evangela, turning to her, and kissing her with a sudden warm impulse. 'That you have need of me makes me the more glad that I have come. I will try to be a true and loyal friend to you, dear Melanie.'

Melanie clung to her, unable to repress a sob.

'Since my mother died,' she said in a shaking

voice, 'I have had no one to turn to. Thekla is much younger than I, and I have had to stand alone. I have scarcely realized how much I have felt that.'

The two girls were silent for a moment or two, and Evangela, realizing how extraordinary it was that she, who, of all things, hated gush and sentimentality, should, upon so short an acquaintance, be taking an absolute stranger to her heart, felt a moment of shyness and discomfort; but Melanie subdued her agitation almost immediately, and reverted to her subject with a frank simplicity that precluded embarrassment.

'I am so thankful that you do not reproach me,' she said; 'but papa said he did not think you would. In England, he says, one thinks differently of these matters.'

'I should think we do!' cried Evangela. 'Why, in England one never hears of duels, and one almost forgets that such things can exist outside a story-book. If a man were to send a challenge to another in England, he would simply be laughed at! It would be regarded as a joke.'

'A joke!' ejaculated Melanie. '*Mon Dieu!* I wish we had that custom here.'

'It seems so extraordinary for such a serious

quarrel to arise out of such a trifling matter,' said Evangela wonderingly. 'If your father had muzzled the Baron himself, one could have understood the grievance. He seems a dangerous character to be at large—more dangerous than his dogs, I should think! But it was only the dogs—it seems such a small cause!'

'Ah, that was not the cause,' said Melanie; 'that was only the excuse. Adlofstein wanted to quarrel with my father, and he took the first excuse that came in his way. He thinks he has cause—but that is his madness. He thinks that his father did not shoot himself because he was mad, but because he was bound by the terms of an American duel—and he suspects my father. Ah, you do not know what an American duel is, perhaps?'

'No. What does it mean?'

'It means dice-boxes or billiard-balls for two, and a pistol-shot for one. The man who loses the throw or draws the black ball is bound to destroy himself at some time agreed upon. So the other escapes suspicion and forfeiture. Yes, it is horrible, wicked, is it not? and the laws are strict against it. Yet people do it, and over and over again it happens, and no one knows who is the adversary.'

'But why should the Baron suspect your father?'

'Because of the Baroness. This horrid wicked woman! She is the old Baron's second wife, and she has always delighted to make mischief. She used to come to the balls here, and she was young, and she had the *beauté du diable*. All the world admired her and made court to her; but mamma could never bear her. She was a great coquette, and she made all men her slaves. My father paid her attention—not more than the rest, you understand—but she saw that it vexed mamma, and so she made the most of it. There was a quarrel between my father and the late Baron Adlofstein, who was then already paying court to her, and even after her marriage there always continued a coolness. It is doubtless on this that Adlofstein bases his suspicion, and perhaps the Baroness may have said something—I don't know—but that Adlofstein has some deep grudge against us is certain, and from what the Baron Stillenheim says, my father thinks that must be it.'

'Who is Baron Stillenheim?'

'He is a retired military officer, who lives with his family at Lindenthal: the Stillenheims, the Adlofsteins, and ourselves—that used to be our little society; but now it is all spoilt, and we

see only the *bourgeoisie* — the Schmits, the Werners, the Kleins — excellent, worthy people, who are kind to us, whom they have known from our babyhood, but, still, not the sort of society in which one finds most pleasure. I am grieved for Thekla, who is growing up satisfied with the standard of these people, and losing the advantages and refinements that she ought to have. And you, too, my poor Evangela—you will find all the small interests and coffee-chatter dull, I fear.'

'Oh no; it will all be so new to me, you see. Is this the town?'

'Yes. We are here already—how short the drive has seemed! This is the Hohle Gasse, and there in the trees you see the church. Now we come into the Platz—that building in the middle is the town-hall. That is the Stillenheims' house—that white one at the side, with a yellow one on each side of it. The brown one at the end of the square is the Casino. Now we turn out of the Platz into the Landstrasse. Here we pass the Freiheit, where the music plays in summer, and all the world comes to promenade; and there you see our house—that big one, with many windows and the double-headed eagle over the archway—can you see it? Thekla and papa will be looking

out—ah, my dear, my dear! how delighted I am to be bringing you home!'

She was pressing Evangela's hand with warm enthusiasm, her eyes were shining, her face beaming with smiles, and the weight of the troubles of which she had been speaking seemed as much forgotten as if they had never been.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF THE TWO-HEADED EAGLE.

The carriage stopped before a large square house that rose high above all the others in the street, and was further distinguished by the arms of Austria, and a great vestibule which occupied most of the ground-floor. From this hall Melanie took Evangela up a broad flight of stone steps that led to the dwelling-rooms above, and in the ante-room at the top they were met by Baron Bertemilian and his younger daughter.

'Permit me to offer you a heartfelt welcome to the country of your mother, and to my house in the same, Fräulein Wynne,' said the Baron in German, with ceremonious courtesy, and he bowed low as he took her hand.

He was a tall man, with a slight and elegant figure, and a thoroughly Austrian type of face, with high cheek-bones and deep-set eyes ; but

it was the distinction of his manner and appearance that especially struck Evangela, and she at once perceived that he was a gentleman in the most aristocratic sense of the term.

Thekla was like her father—a tall, slender, and graceful figure, with small head, dark hair, and deeply-set blue eyes. Her features were not as regular as her sister's, and her eyes were rather small; but they were as exquisite in colour as sapphires of the purest water, and she had a lovely wild-rose complexion, which gave her a beauty of a particularly irresistible kind. She came forward shyly to meet Evangela, and she repeated a greeting in English that had evidently been well studied beforehand:

'Heartiest greeting to my new sister!' she said, with the prettiest grace in the world; and Evangela felt that she could not have hoped for a kinder or warmer reception.

They passed through the folding-doors into a suite of rooms leading one into the other. They had all polished floors of light-coloured wood, and in the corner of each was a large white-tiled stove. In the dining-room a round table was laid for supper, and after Melanie and Thekla had conducted Evangela to her room to take off her things, they all sat down to table. The supper, which was really a little dinner

à la Russe, was a gay and dainty meal. The dishes were French rather than German, and they were excellent. There were no atrocities in the way of kraut, either sweet or sour, and uncooked ham, sausages and fish were conspicuous by their absence. Tômas, the butler, whose beady black eyes and yellow, Sclavonic face betokened his pure Polish blood, waited with sly deftness upon every want, and busied himself with a bubbling samovar which sang from the sideboard the comfortable promise of the cup of Russian tea which was to follow the meal. At the table a gay conversation was kept up with unflagging interest, and the Baron laughed a great deal. Evangela, after her usual habit when with strangers, was more inclined to listen and observe than to talk ; but the few remarks that she let fall about the foreign ways that had most struck her on her journey were productive of immense amusement.

'But how, then, do they manage in England?' inquired the Baron, when Evangela remarked upon the custom of penning passengers up in the waiting-rooms as something peculiar. 'One supposes, if the passengers were allowed to be on the platform, that some of them would surely mount into the wrong train.'

'If they did, that would be their own business,

said Evangela serenely, 'and experience would teach them to be more careful another time. Englishmen prefer to be free to make mistakes if they like.'

The Baron laughed again.

'You are a very strange people, you English,' he said with much amusement, 'and certainly very independent—especially the ladies! It is admirable—ah, most admirable!—but extraordinary. A cousin of mine married an English lady, and an excellent wife she was to him, a charming woman—a very charming woman indeed!—but she would not suffer him to be master in his own house. She sat at the head of the table always, and carved the meat—those immense pieces of meat that she would always have plainly roasted—and she had a cheque-book of her own, and decided all matters connected with the household and servants without any reference to her husband. She managed well, that I will say, and she made him very comfortable; but it was terrible how independent she was. I suppose in England, now, all that would not be unusual?'

'Not at all,' said Evangela, smiling. 'And, after all, does it not seem natural? A man ought to be spared all trouble and worry as much as possible. It is enough that he should

have the cares of his profession or his business on his mind.'

'That is putting it in a new light,' said the Baron, with his gay laugh. 'You are very ingenious, Fräulein, but you do not convince me. And what do you say of the English and American ladies who enter the professions of men—the doctoresses, the journalist ladies, and so on? Do you approve of them, too?'

'Why not?' asked Evangela in surprise. 'If they have a gift for that work, and there are no other claims on them, why should they not use their talent? For them to do ordinary women's work would be like putting tools to a wrong use. The work is not well done, and the instruments, which would have done something else beautifully, are wasted. That would be a pity, wouldn't it?'

The Baron glanced uneasily at his daughters. He himself was edified and amused, and he would have liked to continue the discussion; but it would have been highly inconvenient to him to have his daughters infected by ideas about the emancipation of women, and he did not want the excellent principles of subordination in which they had been brought up to be subverted. He began to feel alarmed lest he should have imported a dangerous element into

his carefully guarded fold, and he looked anxiously to see what effect these startling enunciations would have upon them. But he need not have feared. Melanie was gazing at their exponent with an expression of astonished amusement and incredulity, while Thekla received them with unmitigated repugnance.

'Women to do the work of doctors!' cried she. 'How terrible! But it is impossible! Who would have any confidence in a woman as a doctor? Why, it is against nature; she would faint at the sight of blood.'

Evangela could not restrain a smile, but she felt that it was not a case for argument, and she turned the subject.

'It is astonishing how little idea one has of what it is possible for one to do until one begins to experiment,' she said brightly. 'Now, my uncle, Major Dabley, thought it was quite impossible for me to come here by myself, yet here I am, quite safe, without the smallest adventure or inconvenience by the way. I can scarcely realize it yet, though,' she added with a smile; 'I feel very much as if I were in a dream, and as if I should wake to find myself back in England.'

'We will soon show you that it is not a dream,' said Melanie joyously. 'To-morrow

we will begin to show you about, and we must explain to you our ways. Now, do you know that it is the custom with us to shake hands all round after dinner and supper ?'

Evangela did not know this, and it seemed very funny to her when, a few minutes afterwards, they rose from the table and went through the ceremony. They returned to the sitting-room, and Evangela, glancing round, while Melanie and Thekla discussed where they should take her for her first walk, had leisure for observing its arrangements. At first sight it had very much the effect of a room cleared out for dancing. There was very little furniture in it, and what there was, was arranged squarely along the walls ; but in one corner was a new grand piano, at the sight of which Evangela's eyes brightened.

'You care for music?' she said, turning eagerly to the girls.

'Ah, yes ; we love it!' they both answered —Melanie with genuine enthusiasm, Thekla in more stereotyped fashion.

The Baron, too, declared himself a votary of music, and in evidence thereof produced a flute, with which, he said, he sometimes beguiled his hours of leisure.

'We will not have any music to-night,' said

Melanie rather hastily. 'It is getting late, and Vangela must be tired out after all she has been through. Are you not very tired, dear Vangela?'

Evangela was tired; she was tired out, and she was glad to find herself alone in her room; yet, when Melanie left her, she did not immediately go to bed. Through the long, narrow windows she could see the garden, on which the moon was shining with a brightness that made it as light as day, and the air was filled with the rippling murmur of the river which swept swiftly under the willows at the bottom. She stood gazing at the mountain ridge crowned with pines, which cut the sky high up with an undulating feathery line, and she pondered long on the strange history that Melanie had told her. Then suddenly a cloud, passing over the disc of the moon, threw a wing-like shadow over the house and garden, and an icy breath blew in from the river. Evangela gave an involuntary shiver, and, hastily closing the double windows, went to rest in preparation for the unknown life that was to begin for her on the morrow.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE MIST.

THE next morning, after an eight-o'clock breakfast of creamy coffee and fresh Vienna rolls, Evangela found herself installed in the post of honour behind the sofa-table in the sitting-room ; and Melanie, nestling confidentially by her side, sketched out plans for the disposal of their time. She had drawn out a table of hours for English and German lessons, and Evangela signified her complete approval of its model apportionment of every hour of the day ; but a doubt which arose in her mind whether it would be possible to carry it out regularly was confirmed by a cynical assurance from Thekla.

'There is Melanie again with her hours and her tables! One would suppose that we were black slaves! But you may be quite tranquil, dear Vangela. Something always occurs to

disturb Melanie's calculations, and in the end we shall not perish from hard work.'

'Naturally there must be holidays and interruptions,' cried Melanie in self-defence. 'For example, to-day: it is such a lovely morning, and we want to take Vangela into the woods; it would be absurd to stay in poking over our books. One can talk English out of doors just as well as within. Now, my dear,' she added, with a roguish smile, 'the Parliament is finished. We go to promenade ourselves in the forest.'

'It's *Parl*iament, not Parlīament,' observed Evangela, smiling, as she pushed aside the half-written time-table.

'*Parl*iament? Dear me, how very curious! Our Hanoverian governess did always teach us to say Parlīament. It does sound more naitural so.'

'We say natural, not naitural,' remarked Evangela, laughing now.

'*Mon Dieu!* then it is natcher, not naitcher, as she said? I fear she has instructed us all false.'

'No; that was right; we do say nature; and why we should change the sound in the adjective is more than I can tell you. But there is neither rhyme nor reason in English

pronunciation. I am afraid it will seem puzzling to you at first.'

'Alas, yes! It is a terrible language, and there do seem to be no rules. But never mind; we will not trouble ourselves with it to-day. It is the first day; let us be happy, and speak French comfortably. To-day, my dear, we shall take you to see the forest of the Schaarberg.'

They crossed the river by the primitive wooden bridge at the bottom of the garden, and, following a steep little path that climbed the hill, were soon in the shadow of the forest. The philological discussion was dropped for an exciting race up the hill to the Grosse Quelle, a spot where a little spring welled into a stone basin, and a rustic seat was placed so as to command a view of the town in the valley below. Here, where the sunshine glinted through the branches, and the brown needles made a soft carpet under foot, the three girls sat down to rest.

'Ah, how delicious it is!' cried Evangela. 'I should like to come here every day.'

But the girls cried out both together that there were other still prettier walks that they would take her to.

'See,' said Melanie; 'the forest extends on

every side. Over there, on the other side of the valley, is the Schwarzenberg, where the visitors come in the summer for the water-cure. Down there are the Anlagen, where we skate in winter and promenade in summer — very charming when the band plays. And higher up on this side is the Rauschenbach ravine, where Adlofstein's castle is. We must take you there some day. Those woods are very wild and beautiful.'

The beginning of Evangela's new experience was very promising, and the time seemed to go by as if on wings. In the course of the pleasant morning readings, and the merry rambles over the hills and through the woods, which filled up the days, Evangela soon got to feel as much at home with the girls as if she had known them all her life; and their affectionate appreciation and naïve simplicity made an atmosphere in which she could breathe freely, as she had not done since she had left the home of her childhood.

The first month was a time of lovely autumn weather; and since Evangela expressed a strong preference for the woods, the girls were willing to forego the attractions of the town in order to gratify her. Up to the last days of October the sunshine seemed to have lost nothing

of its summer glory ; but November came in with a sudden change of weather.

Evangela woke up one morning to find a dense white curtain of mist drawn so close against the windows as to shut out from view every glimpse of the hills beyond the river ; and at breakfast Thekla observed, not without some touch of satisfaction in her tone :

'No walk in the woods to-day. If we go out this afternoon, we must be content with the Platz. There we can walk round and round on the dry pavement, and hear how the world goes. *Herr Je !* It seems ages since I have heard any news ! Half the people in the town might be dead and buried, for all I know.'

Evangela had had occasion to observe before this that Thekla took a more lively interest in persons than in places and things, and the substitution of forest rambles for her accustomed promenades round and round the Platz, where she could exchange greetings with her acquaintances, and pick up little bits of gossip, had evidently been a considerable trial to her patience.

The three girls started out in the afternoon, and though her face was turned townwards, Evangela felt a strange exhilaration of spirit as she walked briskly through the cold damp air.

The skies were leaden gray; but the mists, which rolled down the hills and shrouded the woods in mystery, were in the softest tones of gray and white, from the filmiest white smoke wreaths to the most impenetrable veils of darkness, and the mountains, which loomed gigantic through the ever-shifting breaths of cloud, rose high on either side like enormous walls shutting in the valley.

'There is certainly something fascinating in a day like this,' remarked Melanie, echoing, with a sympathy which was like a power of divination in her, Evangela's unspoken impressions. 'There is a strangeness, a mystery about it—something like the effect of moonlight, don't you think? Everything appears so large, so unreal; and one has the sensation that it would not be surprising if at any moment the veil were to be drawn aside to disclose something wonderful and exciting. The mountains, now—might one not imagine them a barrier many thousand feet high?'

'Ah, *mon Dieu*, Melanie! how wearisome is this perpetual *Schwärmerei!* Do come along!' cried Thekla, ruthlessly cutting short Melanie's eloquence. 'I see Clothilde Müller in front, and I want to speak with her.'

Thus adjured, Melanie quickly dropped to

earth again, and while Thekla exchanged confidences with her friend, she pointed out to Evangela, with keen interest and great animation, all the notorieties of the town who chanced to be in the Platz. The little stout Pfarrer, Pater Pfeifer, and his tall, lean assistant, Pater Bauer, Dr. Hempel, and others whom they met, she introduced to her cousin, and Evangela was highly amused by the sweeping and ceremonious bows, and the grandiloquent compliments of these gentlemen.

The romance of the day, however, seemed as if it were to be confined to the mist and the imagination, and nothing could well have been more prosaic and matter-of-fact than the faces and speeches of these worthy Lindenthalers. They were interesting from their novelty. But Evangela was beginning to weary of the perpetual round, and the constant cross-fire of greetings and exclamations, when she saw advancing towards them through the mist the cloaked figure of a man of immense stature.

'Dear me, Melanie, what a tremendously tall man? Who is he?'

Melanie grasped her arm tight, and held on to her as if she had received a sudden shock.

'It is Adlofstein!' she whispered under

her breath. 'It is Baron Adlofstein himself; and there are his two little white dogs—the brutes!'

The towering figure, which looked even taller than it was through the mist, came nearer, and Evangela observed that following close at his heels were a couple of diminutive white Spitz dogs—beautiful little animals, with long, fluffy hair, sharply-pointed black noses, and tails cocked up and curled over their backs like the plumes of pride. They strutted along as if the whole Platz belonged to them, and everybody else were there only on sufferance, and there was something so supremely gentlemanly and aristocratic in their appearance, that their assumption did not seem altogether unwarrantable.

Evangela, however, was too much interested in the master to have more than a glance to spare for the dogs. She could not see much of his face, for he wore a broad-leaved felt hat, which was drawn down so low as to conceal his brow, and the voluminous three-quarter cape, which fell in heavy folds about his massive figure, had the collar pulled up high; but as he passed by, she caught a glimpse of a grim and rugged face, with a heavy brown moustache, and fierce gray eyes that scowled darkly on the

three girls; and she received an impression that chilled, and yet fascinated her.

'What an ogre of a man!' she ejaculated, with an involuntary reaction against this feeling the moment he had gone past. 'He looked at us as if he would like to eat us!'

'*Ach*, Vangela!'—and catching her by the arm, Melanie dragged her on at double speed for a few steps. Then she let go, and turned towards her a face that brimmed over with amusement and delight, and yet expressed some consternation.

'My dear Vangela, your voice is so very clear—and you spoke just as he went past! He must certainly have heard!'

'What does it matter? It was in English, and he would not understand.'

'But he does understand English! He understands it perfectly!' Did we not tell you? The first Baroness Adlofstein was an Englishwoman, and she sent her son to England to be educated. He has spent much time in England, and I believe he speaks English as well as German, or better. Oh, my dear, if he heard!'

'I am sure I hope he did,' said Thekla. 'It would be good for him to learn what an impression he makes upon strangers, with that

ugly, scowling face that he wears, and his hunched-up shoulders.'

'I suppose he won't send me a challenge to a duel *à outrance*, or lie in wait for me in some dark passage and murder me?' Evangela inquired in pretended apprehension; and Thekla, who always took everything quite literally, felt it necessary to reassure her.

'Where is he going to?' said Melanie, who was looking back to follow the enemy with her eyes. 'Ah, to the Stillenheims'! Then that friendship is on again. I thought that he had left off going there, and that it was broken off.'

'He has been ill,' said Thekla. 'Clothilde Müller was telling me just now that he has been very ill for some weeks past. That, of course, is the reason why we have seen nothing of him for so long, for he generally passes our house at least once in the day with one of his impertinent little dogs.'

'I liked the dogs better than the man,' remarked Evangela. 'The dogs are ornamental, which is certainly more than you can say of their master.'

'Clothilde heard it from the Hempel, with whom she seems to be great friends now,' said Thekla, continuing her account. 'She was there to *goûter* yesterday afternoon, and the

Hempel told her that the doctor was called up very suddenly to Schloss Adlofstein one night to attend upon the Baron. It was a very strange illness, and Dr. Hempel could not understand what could have caused it. It seemed to him almost like the effect of poison, his wife said ; but of course that was only conjecture, and she did not wish it to be repeated.'

'So she repeated it to Clothilde, and Clothilde repeated it to you,' said Melanie. 'Pooh! that is nothing but foolish gossip—and I dare say Clothilde exaggerated. But he has been ill, no doubt, and I suppose that was why he was so tremendously wrapped up.'

'No doubt. Frau Hempel said that her husband had forbidden him to stir out ; but of course that would be enough to make him go out straight. Ah, look, he is coming out now, and Auguste is with him ; Stephanie also! They are going for a walk.'

Three figures came out of the square white house which Melanie had before pointed out as the Stillenheims', and through the dense white mist, which was gathering thicker and denser every moment, Evangela saw Stephanie von Stillenheim, who was walking next to the tower-ingly tall Baron. She had a thin, plain face, with

features of a Mongolian type, small, restless brown eyes, and a forced and anxious smile. She was youthfully dressed in a jaunty, close-fitting costume, but she did not look young. Her short, stumpy figure was flat and angular, and there was no vestige of youthful bloom left in her sallow unattractive face. Evangela looked at her, and felt a sudden pang of regret that a woman should ever look so plain ; yet pity would evidently have been wasted upon her, for she seemed quite satisfied with herself, and she was talking and laughing gaily as she looked up into Baron Adlofstein's face.

She passed the Bertemilians and their friend without seeming to be aware of their presence, and as soon as the party were out of earshot, Thekla turned to her sister with a scornful curl of her pretty lips.

'She can see us when he is not there. She nodded to me the other day when I passed her, but of course everything is second to his good opinion, and she would not raise her little finger to save us from perdition if she thought she would be risking that.'

'We can do without Stephanie Stillenheim,' said Melanie proudly—'little mischief-maker that she is! I consider that we are much better without her friendship.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Thekla. 'And, *mon Dieu!* how *passé* she has become! It is terrible how old she looks!'

'How old is she?' asked Evangela. 'She looks somewhere about thirty.'

'Oh, she can hardly be that! She says she is four-and-twenty only, but she has been four-and-twenty for a long time. She must be at least seven or eight and twenty now.'

'Shall we go home, Vangela?' said Melanie suddenly. 'Thekla, I am sure you have had enough of trotting backwards and forwards on this dirty Platz for one day, and it is getting late. We need not go up to the top again—let us turn down by the church, and go home through the Anlagen.'

It was a roundabout way of getting home that Melanie proposed; but it was evidently suggested by her desire to avoid a second encounter with Adlofstein and his friends. She had not expressed so much anger and scorn as Thekla, but Evangela saw in her face the evidence that she had felt the humiliation and mortification not less deeply.

'That Stephanie!' said Thekla: 'she always hated us, though she tried to hide it before. Did you hear the bad trick she played on Melanie for her first ball, Vangela? Well, I

will tell you. First she goes to Troppau, and spreads all about the report that Melanie is a great beauty and wit, and will eclipse all the girls when she comes out ; and then she comes and tells Melanie that the women are all green with jealousy, and the men on the tiptoe of expectation. Imagine only what a reception that was likely to prepare for Melanie !'

'It nearly spoilt all my pleasure,' said Melanie. 'I had been so happy in looking forward to my first ball, and I had such a lovely dress. It was white tulle, clouds and clouds of tulle over ivory satin—the dresses were worn so full then—and it was exquisitely trimmed with marguerites which had diamond dewdrops on their petals ; but when I came down I was as pale as death with fright, and papa looked me over and said : "You look just like a fly drowning in a can of milk !" That did not help to reassure me, you may suppose, and when I entered the ballroom I felt ready to sink through the floor. Nobody welcomed us, nobody spoke to us, and on every side I saw nothing but hostile or curious eyes. I longed to rush home and tear off my things, that I might creep into bed and hide myself ; but as I could not do that, I took my courage in my two hands, and marched up the

room with mamma. We found a place by our friend the Countess Rothenfels, and presently some friends of papa's came up to be introduced. Soon I had my card full, and I danced every dance, and had heaps of bouquets in the cotillion ; so I enjoyed myself immensely—but it was no fault of Stephanie Stillenheim's that I did. Several of my partners told me that the belles of Troppau were furious, and they had made their admirers promise beforehand that they would not dance with me. Was it not shameful ?'

'Wait, Melanie. Let us walk more slowly,' said Thekla suddenly.

While Melanie had been speaking, Thekla, whose sharp eyes nothing ever escaped, had observed that the party they were anxious to avoid had also left the Platz, and now she pointed them out as they issued from a by-street just ahead of them.

'They have taken the short-cut past Pollok's,' exclaimed Melanie, instantly slackening her steps. 'Where can they be going ?'

'They are going—yes, they actually are—to the Greifenburg ! Adlofstein is taking them in —Stephanie and her brother. They are going to look over it. Melanie, that means something !' said Thekla, turning to her sister with eyes wide open with dismay.

'It means that Adlofstein is greater friends than ever with the Stillenheims,' said Melanie. 'Perhaps it means that Stephanie will have the desire of her heart gratified at last, and that she will be married. Well, there will be few who will envy her.'

'Surely she would never marry such a man!' exclaimed Evangela. 'Would she be so mad as to think of it?'

'Stephanie has thought of it for a long time,' said Thekla, with a laugh. 'She is mad to get a husband of some kind; but Adlofstein will be a fool if he marries her. His home must be uncomfortable enough already with that mad stepmother of his, and with a *bec* like Stephanie added to the *ménage* as a wife—*pfui teufel!* I should not imagine that any one would envy *him!*'

'Does this place belong to Baron Adlofstein?' asked Evangela, looking up at the building they were passing.

It was a massive pile of gray stone; square, with round turrets at each corner; and it showed signs of having been a fortress of some strength. In one place a cannon-ball was still sticking in the masonry, and it was surrounded by a wide and deep moat. The drawbridge had been replaced by a permanent way,

and Adlofstein and his friends had passed in over it.

'I thought,' said Evangela, who had followed their disappearing figures with a gaze full of interest—'I thought you told me that his castle was higher up in the mountains? You know you said you would take me there some day.'

'Yes,' said Melanie. 'That is Schloss Adlofstein, the old place that belongs to the family. This is the Greifenburg, which used to be the Archbishop's palace, but the Adlofsteins bought it a long time ago. It was at the beginning of the century, I think, that it passed into their hands, and until the last few years—until the late Baron's death indeed—the family used to come here to live in the winter-time. It is very wild and desolate up in the mountains where Schloss Adlofstein is, and they sometimes get snowed up; but this man is a regular hermit, and I believe he likes the isolation. I wonder what his reason for visiting this place with the Stillenheims can possibly be? Can he mean to live in it again?'

'If Stephanie has an interest in the game, she would naturally prefer to live in the town,' observed Thekla significantly. 'She would willingly leave Schloss Adlofstein to the mad Baroness to be quit of her, but she may not find

it easy to manage that so cheaply. The Baroness is cunning enough, and sane enough on most points—so sane, that it would not be easy to get her shut up even if Adlofstein wished it, Dr. Hempel says; but Adlofstein does not wish it. Since his father's death he has humoured his stepmother in every respect—out of remorse for the quarrels which embittered the last years of the old Baron, one supposes; but Hempel says also out of a feeling of compassion for her condition.'

'It was caused by the horror of the Baron's death, you see,' said Melanie. 'What horror one does not exactly know, but it must have been something very dreadful to have upset the reason of a heartless woman like that, and it seems probable that she was a witness of the tragedy, whatever it was.'

'Bah! It could only have been one thing,' said Thekla contemptuously. 'As for the notion of an American duel, nobody but Adlofstein thinks it. The Stillenheims may pretend that they do, but it is only because they want to keep up the feud with us. I should not be in the least surprised if it were that little viper Stephanie who suggested the idea in order to make a break between us and Adlofstein. She was desperately afraid of you at one time,

Melanie. You know, we used to see a good deal of him—at the time when his cousin was staying with him, you remember?'

'Vangela — dear Vangela,' said Melanie hurriedly, 'you will not mention to papa what has happened to-day, will you? We always try to keep the remembrance of Adlofstein out of his thoughts as much as possible, and we never mention it when we have seen him. It is a bitter subject to us all, but most of all to him.'

They had reached the door at the bottom of their garden, which the path through the Anlagen and along the river led to, and it might have been from a fear lest they should meet the Baron before she had time to utter a warning that Melanie interrupted Thekla's reminiscences so hastily and abruptly; but Evangela was struck by her agitation, and she wondered whether there were more cause for it than appeared on the surface. Was it possible, she asked herself, as she thought over the story and the incidents of the afternoon—could it possibly be — that Melanie cared for Baron Adlofstein? She recalled one or two points that seemed to give colour to this supposition, and she remembered the stricken look in her face as Adlofstein had gone past them; but

that might very well mean no more than the natural mortification which a proud and sensitive nature would feel in such a painful position. No; it was a most unlikely thing, and there was no real ground for the theory. Evangela dismissed the idea from her mind.

CHAPTER V.

'DAS EWIG WEIBLICHE.'

FOR some days after the encounter with Adlofstein in the town, Melanie was far from well. She said that the mist had affected her throat, and she sat listless all day long, complaining alternately of heat and cold, with a flush in her cheeks and a lustre in her eyes that made Evangela feel anxious about her. But when Evangela urged her to stay in bed and keep quiet, she only opened her great eyes very wide and laughed.

'My dear, what an idea! I couldn't possibly! There is nothing that papa hates more than illness, and I think that nothing but the necessity of dying can justify it in his opinion. I don't wish to die, and I know he would never forgive me if I didn't, so I am bound to keep up. Papa has never been ill himself, you see, so he cannot understand why anybody else should be.'

All that Evangela could do was to prevent her from going out ; and that she might not feel lonely, she herself stayed in too.

Thekla went out by herself, and would come in with blooming cheeks and long, animated stories of the doings and sayings of the town. She came in one dull afternoon, about a week after the mists and storms of November had begun, with a face even more glowing than usual, and unwonted excitement making her eyes shine like stars.

'Children!' she said in German, as she appeared in the doorway of the sitting-room where Melanie and Evangela were bending over an English novel together—'children, I have news—great news! Guess what it is!'

It was clear from her voice and look that the news must be of an agreeable nature, and Melanie's face brightened.

'What is it?' she asked impatiently. 'It is absurd to make us guess when we have not an idea. Perhaps Clothilde Müller is going to be married—you would think that great news, I suppose?'

'*Pfui!* Clothilde Müller!' said Thekla contemptuously. 'It is something much more interesting than that. Well, I will give you a clue. It is an explanation of the visit to the

Greifenburg which we witnessed the other day.'

'Then perhaps it is really a question of marriage-bells for poor Baroness Stephanie?' said Evangela, as Melanie did not speak.

'No; *she* is not to be the new inmate of the Schloss; it is someone much more delightful and interesting.'

'Then Adlofstein is going to marry, after all!' cried Melanie breathlessly.

'No, no! It is not a lady at all who is coming. It is a gentleman—and such a gentleman! Someone we know. Come now, Melanie, it is someone you met at your first ball.'

'The Marquis de St. Evrémonde!' Melanie exclaimed instantly. 'No, you don't really mean to say——'

'I do!' said Thekla joyously, and, catching Evangela round the waist, she waltzed round the room with her. 'He is actually here, and, what is more, I have already seen him! He has got some Government work on hand that brings him for some time to this part of the world, and, as Adlofstein has placed the old Burg at his disposal, he intends to make Lindenthal his headquarters. Frau Kutscher, whose daughter Hedwig is in charge of the Schloss, told me all about it. It was a visit of

inspection that Adlofstein was making that day to see that all was complete, and Stephanie went with him to put in her word—meddlesome busybody that she is. Hedwig Kutscher detests her, and so does everyone else in the town.'

Melanie was plainly very much interested. The colour had returned to her cheeks, and the light to her eyes. She gazed intently before her with an expression that varied with her changing thoughts, and her lips parted in a smile. Then suddenly a depressing idea occurred to her, and her face fell.

'What difference does it make to us?' she asked mournfully. 'You know, nobody ever comes near us now. Even the officers passing through the town avoid us as if we were lepers, and St. Evrémonde is Adlofstein's friend.'

'And therefore dares to take more liberties with him than anyone else would. You wait till you hear all, my dear,' said Thekla triumphantly. 'I told you that I saw St. Evrémonde. He was coming out of Pollok's with Auguste Stillenheim, and I recognized him directly. I don't think that he knew me at once, for I saw him turn to Auguste and ask some question. I am convinced that it was to ask who I was, because as soon as he had been

answered he looked again at me, and made me a bow—*mon Dieu!* such a bow!'

'It seems so odd that the men should bow first as they do here,' remarked Evangela; 'I should think it must be inconvenient sometimes.'

'It saves one much trouble,' said Thekla; 'I would not like it the other way at all. Do the ladies bow first in England? *Ach Himmel!* how tiresome that must be! One would have to be for ever on the watch to avoid giving offence. Now, to-day I should not have known what to do—whether to bow or not. Oh, Vangela, you must see him! You are sure to admire him. He is considered one of the handsomest men in Vienna — and he is so charming and witty!'

'He is awfully handsome, my dear,' said Melanie in English, 'but, oh, such a lady-killer! Half the girls in Vienna, they say, are in love with him, and it is a marvel that he has not been married by main force by now. But he is not well off. He has nothing but what he gets from his office, and no doubt he would not take a wife who did not bring him a good large *dot*.'

Evangela's little nose wrinkled itself up expressively, and her lips took a downward curve.

'Is this Adonis a Frenchman?' she asked disdainfully.

'Oh no! At least, the family was French originally, of course. We have no marquisate in Austria, and he bears the title of an ancestor who came to this country at the time of the French Revolution. But they have married into Austrian families ever since, so they are much more Austrian than French now. Oh, Vangela, I am so very curious to know what you will think of him! I hope we shall meet him before long.'

Evangela could not help smiling to herself at this illustration of 'the eternal feminine,' as she sat down to her translation of Goethe. Melanie and Thekla could think and talk of nothing else but the new-comer, and it was evident that they meant to waste no possible opportunity of renewing the acquaintance.

Melanie's indisposition cleared away like magic, and the next day, though the afternoon was far from inviting, she and Thekla put on their best hats, and called upon Evangela to accompany them to the town. Evangela appeared dressed in the oldest and shabbiest apparel that she possessed.

'It is such a bad day,' she replied, in answer to the lively remonstrances of the girls; and she

had decidedly the best of it, as a heavy downpour of rain came on, and they had to return home without having had even a glimpse of the interesting stranger.

For several days they continued to visit the town and perambulate the Platz in the hope of seeing the Marquis, but without result. They heard a good deal about him from Baron Bertemilian, and other people who saw and met him at the Casino, but they never chanced to come across him; and Evangela, who looked upon the tramp round and round the Platz as an exercise little better than the treadmill, was heartily wearied, and she began to wish him at Jericho, or any other distant spot.

She broke into open mutiny at last, and one fine day—the first they had had for weeks—she insisted upon the fulfilment of the long-standing promise that she should be taken to see the woods of the Rauschenbach.

A wild north wind was blowing down the Landstrasse, and the clouds were scudding swiftly across the sky; but the sun was shining gloriously, and the river, swollen by the rains, sang a song of triumph as it rushed along down the valley. At a point where one of the innumerable sawmills turned by the water was filling the air with busy sound, the girls

took a turn to the left, where the tributary stream of the Rauschenbach joined the river, and they followed its windings through the meadows until they entered the deep ravine from which it issued. This was the Rauschenbach gorge, at the head of which rose the towers of Schloss Adlofstein, and so precipitous and thickly wooded were the hills on either side that scarcely a breath of wind was to be felt in the valley.

The rocks and woods were here more wild and beautiful than any that Evangela had seen before, and she uttered exclamations of delight at every turn of the fern-fringed lane that wound alongside the babbling brook. The brilliant sunshine was streaming down the glen from the west, shining through aisle upon aisle of the pillared pines, touching with gold and crimson their ruddy stems, and transmuting into glory the natural forest fane. At a turn of the road where the towers of Adlofstein came into sight, the girls stopped, and Evangela gazed with admiration at the rocky height which seemed like the gate of the gorge, with the stately castle that crowned it standing out against the western sky.

'How beautiful!' exclaimed Evangela, with kindling eyes. 'Those massive towers seem

to be keeping guard over the valley. And what a haven of peace and beauty it is—so quiet and sheltered, while the storm is raging all the time outside. I should like to stay here for ever.'

'It is pretty, isn't it?' said Melanie. 'But you should see it in the spring, when the fresh green of the other trees shines in among the pines, and the apple and pear trees are all in blossom. The meadows at the bottom of the valley are like a sea of white flowers then—much prettier than the gloomy black pines up here.'

'I suppose it all belongs to Baron Adlofstein?' Evangela asked abruptly, as they sat down to rest on a felled pine-tree that lay prone among its fellows in the wood a little higher up than the road.

'Yes, all,' said Thekla, 'and he is so disagreeable to strangers that hardly anyone from Lindenthal ever ventures to come near. You know, Melanie, that papa does not at all like us to walk here, and we ought not really to have come.'

Thekla had been disappointed of the walk in the town, which offered so many more possibilities to her than the solitudes of the woods, and she was a little cross and perverse in

consequence. She sat at one end of the fir-trunk, ploughing up the brown needles with the toe of her slender, well-shod foot, and listening discontentedly to the remarks of the other two. She was thinking regretfully of the Platz, where the Marquis de St. Evrémonde, if he appeared, would have no one but the Stillenheims to turn to, when she raised her eyes, and suddenly caught sight of the very person who was occupying her thoughts.

'Look, Melanie! look, Vangela!' she exclaimed in a rapid whisper. 'There he is—the Marquis—coming down the lane. Don't you see him? He has been up at Schloss Adlofstein, without doubt.'

Melanie jumped up from her seat, and, following the direction of Thekla's eyes, saw a slight figure in an irreproachable suit of light gray walking rapidly down the lane just below them, not thirty yards away.

'He will pass without seeing us—how maddening!' she said in a regretful whisper. 'Shall we walk quickly down?'

'*No!*' said Evangela, with a decision that took both girls by surprise. 'No, Melanie, we can hardly do that.'

Thekla darted an angry glance at her, and then burst suddenly into a little peal of laughter.

'Oh, Vangela, Vangela, how funny you are! But we really cannot stay here all night.'

Her clear, ringing tones attracted the attention of the Marquis, as she had intended that they should, and he looked up in surprise. He stood hesitating for a moment; then, smiling and raising his hat, he turned aside from the road, and walked swiftly up the hill into the wood.

'I thought I could not be mistaken,' he said, bowing very low as he came near. 'I looked up at the sound of what seemed like fairy laughter, and for a moment imagined that I was the victim of some hallucination; but it is the Baronesses Bertemilian that I have the honour of addressing.'

Evangela retained her seat on the fallen pine-tree, and while the girls responded to this salutation, she was critically observing the Adonis of whom she had heard so much. That he was remarkably handsome there was no disputing. His features were as nobly cut as those of any Greek statue, and his dark blue eyes, with lashes as black as his hair, were marvellously large and beautiful. His face, indeed, was quite perfect—much too perfect for a man, Evangela thought; and it would have been open to the charge of effeminacy but for the

massive strength of the chin and brow, and a certain keen glint in the eyes. One defect, indeed, Evangela found in him, and that was that he was short. His figure was slight, certainly, and it was so symmetrical as to combine strength with grace in a remarkable degree; but, still, it was very decidedly below the middle height. Evangela was noting this redeeming deficiency with a certain satisfaction, when she woke up with a start to the consciousness that Melanie was introducing her.

'The Marquis de St. Evrémonde, my dear Vangela. Monsieur de St. Evrémonde, let me present you to our cousin and friend, Miss Vangela Wynne. She is English; so here is an opportunity of improving yourself. Do you speak that language?'

'A few words only,' answered St. Evrémonde with a gay laugh, as he turned and bowed to Evangela. 'Oll raight! Do I say it correctly, mademoiselle? It is what I hear most frequently from those English gentlemen with whom I am acquainted. It seems to me that they are always saying "Oll raight!"'

He spoke in French—such French as even Melanie and Thekla did not speak, and the perfection and refinement of his accent was somehow enhanced by his droll mispronuncia-

tion of the two English words. Evangela felt that there was something peculiarly engaging in his manner of addressing her, and she could not help smiling.

'And what conclusion do you draw from it, monsieur? That we English are an easy-going nation?'

'Yes, mademoiselle—so long as you have your own way; if you didn't, then, *sapristi!* it would not be oll raight any more. And so I conclude that the English are accustomed to carry all before them. The English ladies I know do.'

His manner more than his words implied a compliment—a compliment so easy and impersonal that it seemed only a graceful figure of speech, and Evangela smiled again.

They lingered a few moments in the wood—a picturesque group in the intensely golden gleams that came in long glowing shafts of light between the red pine-stems; and as Evangela listened, she began to understand the strong personal fascination which, more than any advantages of appearance, had made Melanie and Thekla speak of St. Evrémonde as being so irresistible. As his way home took him past their house, he begged to have the honour of escorting them, and the two girls

were much too delighted to think of offering any objection. He walked by Melanie's side, therefore, talking with sparkling animation of Vienna, and of the mutual acquaintances that they had there, and the way seemed extraordinarily short. To his cousin, Baron Adlofstein, and his residence as the Baron's guest at the old Schloss, he contrived with some adroitness to avoid all allusion for some time; but when they had turned out of the Rauschenbach ravine, and were approaching Baron Bertemilian's house in the Landstrasse, he introduced the subject.

'I had been up to Schloss Adlofstein this afternoon to see my cousin, who has been ill,' he said smoothly. 'He has had a recurrence of the strange attack of illness from which he suffered some weeks ago. He looks a perfect wreck, poor fellow!'

Melanie sighed; but it did not seem to Evangela that it was out of sympathy for Baron Adlofstein.

'You are staying at his house in Lindenthal, are you not?' she said, in rather a melancholy voice.

'Yes,' he answered. 'I shall be there some time, as I have a good deal of the business of the province to look into. I hope, therefore,

that I may have the pleasure of seeing something of Baron Bertemilian and of you.'

The cloud did not clear from Melanie's face. She glanced quickly at Thekla, and hesitated for a moment; then she said hastily:

'I fear that you will not find that possible. It is very kind of you to wish it, and it would be very pleasant for us. I am sure my father would be delighted. He sees scarcely anyone, and our lives are very lonely. But you are Baron Adolfstein's friend, and you must know of his enmity towards us. He carries his hostility so far as to include every one who continues to show us any friendliness, and he has succeeded in cutting us off from all association with our neighbours of our own class. How can you, then, who are his friend and guest——'

'It is precisely because I am his friend,' said the Marquis, with a curious smile. 'It is just because of that circumstance that I can do what anyone else might not be able to do. Adlofstein has never yet been able to prevent me from doing anything that I had a mind to, and he will certainly not do it in this instance.'

'If only we do not involve you in the same trouble as our own—that would be so terrible!'

said Thekla timidly, and she lifted her pretty eyes with an appealing gaze which few men would have been proof against.

St. Evrémonde's appreciation was clearly discernible in his glance, and his resolution not to be cheated out of the pleasant intercourse which opened before him was so much strengthened, that when he took leave of the girls at their door he expressed his intention of calling upon Baron Bertemilian at the earliest opportunity.

'He is away now, I think you told me?' he said, as he shook hands with Melanie.

'Yes. He has been on circuit in his district for the last few days, but he returns to-morrow,' answered Melanie, with sparkling eyes.

'Then I shall do myself the honour of waiting upon him on the day after,' said St. Evrémonde, and, lifting his hat with an air and grace which was quite different from the manner of the Lindenthalers, he walked on to the town.

Melanie and Thekla immediately turned to Evangela with a burst of delighted exclamations and questions. They were eager to know her opinion of their paragon; but Evangela did not feel inclined to commit herself, and she parried their inquiries by turning their thoughts in another direction.

'Alas, alas! my dear girls,' she said seriously. 'You have forgotten one thing.'

'What is it?' they both cried, instantly sobered by her manner.

'You will know when you look in your looking-glass,' she answered pityingly.

'*Oh, Sancta Maria in Himmel!*' screamed Melanie in a fright. 'What on earth is the matter? Surely it cannot be that my face is dirty?'

'Oh, it is not quite so bad as that,' replied Evangela reassuringly; 'but you don't seem to have realized, either of you, that you have seen and talked to the Marquis *in your everyday hats!*'

The diversion was instantaneous and complete.

CHAPTER VI.

GODDESSES THREE.

When Baron Bertemilian returned home, he was greatly interested and excited by the account that Melanie had to give him. The flush on his high cheekbone, and the light in his eyes as he inquired eagerly into every detail of what had passed, showed how much importance he attached to the incident; and from the exultation with which he looked forward to the promised visit, Evangela gained some idea of the martyrdom which his long ostracism must have been. With the prospect of relief from the ban, his spirits rose until they ran away with his discretion, and he indulged in jokes of a sort that Evangela was not used to.

'Which of you is it whose bright eyes have been the attraction?' he inquired, mischievously glancing from one to the other of the girls; and then, as he saw Evangela's expression, he

burst out laughing again. 'But seriously,' he said, 'you must look after your hearts, all of you! St. Evrémonde is all very well as a pleasant acquaintance, but he has the name of being a most inveterate flirt, and all the mammas in Vienna are afraid of him. You must take care!'

The sisters laughed light-heartedly at this warning; but it made Evangela grave, and it recurred uncomfortably to her mind the next day, when the Marquis came to pay the promised visit.

The sunshine streamed through the long narrow windows on to the parqueted floor of the big salon that was so seldom used, bringing out the colour and scent of the flowers which Thekla had spent the morning in arranging, and it shone on Melanie's soft fair hair, and intensified the wonderful amber lights in her great brown eyes, as she laughed and talked. Melanie understood to perfection the art of entertaining—it was a gift born in her—and Evangela observed that St. Evrémonde, who sat next to her, was wholly charmed. He did not stay very long, as he said he had to go on to Adlofstein to see his cousin; but it was a very pleasant, gay little visit. Evangela was rather silent, and from her place on the other

side of Melanie, she thought she might venture to indulge in her critical propensities without fear of remark; but she was startled in the midst of her meditations to meet St. Evrémonde's blue eyes fixed upon her with a gaze which seemed to divine her thoughts.

'Mademoiselle is a student, and an observer of character among other things, I am sure,' he remarked smilingly as he rose to go.

'She is a student indeed!' said the Baron good-naturedly. 'You would say so, indeed, if you knew all her attainments. Latin and Greek I believe she knows as well as her own language. She actually reads the classics for pleasure. Now, Fräulein, you know that you do! Have I not often caught you at it?'

'Oh, she is terribly clever!' said Melanie, smiling at Evangela's look of perturbation. 'I am awe-struck when I look into the books that she pores over, and I am so thankful that in this country ladies are not expected to learn all these things. But Vangela is not a blue-stocking; she loves the woods and an out-door life, and she is looking forward to the ice-pleasures of the winter as much as any of us.'

'Ah, you have an excellent Eis-platz here, have you not?' said St. Evrémonde. 'I anticipate much enjoyment on the ice during

my stay here, and I hope we may have many pleasant meetings there.'

'Oh, Vangela!' cried Melanie, turning to her cousin with flushed cheeks and shining eyes as soon as the Marquis was gone, 'you heard what he said about the ice? He evidently does mean to keep up our friendship in spite of Adlofstein. Is he not charming—is he not chivalrous?'

'He is delightful!' sighed Thekla; 'so handsome, such an elegant figure—and his clothes fit him so well!'

Evangela suddenly began to laugh.

'You girls are too funny!' she said; 'but he certainly does dress well. He dresses like an Englishman!'

'Ah, you observed that,' said Thekla, much struck. 'Well, I will tell you! He has an English tailor—he gets everything from London, so naturally his dress is like an Englishman's.'

'How do you know that, Thekla?' demanded Melanie.

'Oh, the Kutscher told me! Her daughter is housekeeper at the Greifenburg, you know, and she hears everything from St. Evrémonde's valet. He is a Frenchman, very smart and good-looking, and he tells the most amusing

stories you ever heard; Marie told me one——'

'Thekla, you should not gossip with these people!' exclaimed Melanie vehemently. 'It is not right! You should not listen to their stories, and talk with them as if you were one of themselves, and if you do it any more I shall tell papa of it.'

Thekla pouted, and her pretty face looked extremely cross; but the return of Baron Bertemilian, who had attended his guest to the door, caused her to refrain from a dispute. He came back smiling and looking well pleased.

'Well, well!' he said. 'You have made an impression on M. de St. Evrémonde indeed! What do you think he said about you?'

'What, what?' cried both his daughters together. 'Oh, do tell us!'

'He said that when he came upon you in the forest, he saw a perfect illustration of the three goddesses on Mount Ida—a most charming picture, he said. I felt much inclined to inquire which of the three he considered the Venus; but I thought of Fräulein Vangela,' glancing at her mischievously, 'and preserved my discretion.'

Evangela looked at Thekla, so tall and straight and graceful, with her little dark head,

her sapphire eyes, and wild-rose complexion. She was certainly the most like Venus ; and yet when she turned from her to Melanie's richer colouring and more mature beauty, she thought to herself that in this case it might very well be Juno to whom most men would be inclined to award the palm.

'He evidently supposes you to be a Minerva in point of learning, Vangela,' observed Melanie, smiling.

'Does he elect himself to the part of Paris ?' inquired Evangela, with a disdainful little curl of her lip. 'He had better not come trying to sow discord here !'

Meanwhile St. Evrémonde, on his way to Schloss Adlofstein, was recalling the scene which he had witnessed in the woods ; and as he passed the place, he made up his mind that he would broach the subject to his cousin, and have it out with him that very day.

The room which Adlofstein chiefly used was a large octagonal one high up in the western turret, which had always been his especial den, and here St. Evrémonde found him shivering over an enormous fire of pine-logs that was blazing on the hearth. The *Englishes Kamin*, or open fireplace, was an innovation due to tastes acquired in England, and there were

other signs of his foreign education, in the English and French books that were scattered all about. The room was lined with books, and a little table near the fire was piled so high with heavy volumes that it could hold no more, and the overflow formed a good-sized stack upon the floor. The only place that was not invaded by books was a large armchair that was drawn up in front of the fire, and this was occupied by a small ball of white fluff, out of which peered a sharp black nose and two brilliant black eyes which kept jealous watch upon another ball of white fluff reposing on the rug.

Both dogs growled slightly as St. Evrémonde entered the room ; for, bitter as was the envy and animosity that raged between them, they would always combine to attack strangers, and the Marquis, having never taken any trouble to disguise his bad opinion of them, was an especially obnoxious foe.

'Get out, you little beast!' he said, apostrophizing the gentleman in the chair, almost as soon as he came in. 'Really, Louis, how you can permit these little wretches to take possession of the only comfortable seat in the room, and cover it all over with their disgusting white hairs, is extraordinary to me! However,

I chase him now. Off with you!' and poor Spitz found himself unceremoniously ejected.

He retired, growling and showing his teeth, to the shelter of his master's legs, and Blitz followed after him with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

'Ha!' he said in dog-language, 'you got the chair to-day; but you have been turned out ignominiously; the little man kicked you—I saw him—and you hadn't even the spirit to bite him. Bah, what a poltroon you are!'

Blitz looked quite innocent while he was snuffing round his brother saying this; and when Spitz turned upon him, swearing and biting, it appeared as if he were committing an unprovoked assault. A fiendish row ensued, and it ended in Spitz being turned out of the room neck and crop, while Blitz, who played the injured innocent, was allowed to remain.

'Brute!' ejaculated St. Evrémonde, referring to the disgraced Spitz. 'He was angry with me for turning him out of his chair, so he must needs vent his spleen upon his brother. But they are both equally bad-tempered, and they are useless little brutes besides. I wonder that you should keep them, Louis. It is not the sort of dog that I should have thought you would have chosen.'

'I did not choose them,' replied Adlofstein, 'They were a present that my father made to his wife not long before his death; and she kept them for a time. But they are ill-tempered, as you justly observe, and she is not the person to stand that! After they had bitten holes through every pair of slippers that she possessed, they found the life in the drawing-room too hot for them, and they decided to attach themselves to me. I don't particularly care for their society, but they know which side of their bread is buttered, just as well as if they were human beings, and they stick to me as pertinaciously as leeches wherever I go. They are a great nuisance sometimes.'

'They are indeed,' said St. Evrémonde, thinking of the feud that they had been made the occasion for. 'Louis,' he added abruptly, 'I should like to know the rights of your quarrel with the Bertemilians. What is your real grudge against them?'

Adlofstein glanced up in surprise at the unexpected question. He was looking frightfully ill and haggard, and he was leaning forward on the sofa, with a fur-lined pelisse huddled round his huge frame; but upon the introduction of this topic, he pulled himself up suddenly, and

his brows drew together in a straight line till they almost met.

'The quarrel was about my dogs,' he said briefly. 'Bertemilian conceived it to be his duty to pester me in his capacity of Jack in office, and he went too far. I cannot tell you the whole story,' he said languidly. 'The details are wearisome. I thought you knew them.'

'Of course I know them. Everybody knows them, but everybody knows also that that affair was a mere excuse for forcing a quarrel upon Bertemilian. A man like you does not mistake molehills for mountains, and get up a serious quarrel out of a petty matter of that sort without some reason at the back of it. What is the real cause of offence?—that is what I want to know.'

Adlofstein raised his eyebrows, and his grim face assumed an expression of absolute impenetrability.

'If you want to know that, you want to know more than I propose to tell you, my dear fellow,' he said coldly. 'What is your object in entering upon this subject? Are you desirous of scoring a few marks for yourself in the world to come, by assuming the office of peacemaker? because if that is your idea, I warn you that your pains will be wasted.'

'I am sorry to hear you say so,' said St. Evrémonde. 'It is not so much for my own sake that I should like to see that quarrel made up as for yours. You live the life of a hermit up here, and with no companion but the poor Baroness, who is so full of quips and cranks, I wonder that you do not go melancholy mad yourself. And all the time there is close at hand a pleasant house where you might visit —three charming girls as good-looking and well-bred as you could find if you were to search through Vienna——'

'Aha!' said Adlofstein grimly, 'now we come to the kernel of the nut; I see what you are driving at. You have been looking out for some amusement with which to beguile the tedium of the time you are condemned to spend away from Vienna, and you have discovered that the two Bertemilians are the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood. I see. So you want to make their acquaintance, do you?'

'I have made it already,' replied St. Evrémonde. 'I met the Baroness Melanie three years ago, when she came out at Troppau, and when I saw her the other day in these woods, of course I recalled myself to her remembrance.'

'In these woods?' exclaimed Adlofstein, starting up from his seat—'up here in this valley?'

'Yes; not half a mile away from this spot! The prettiest picture that your gloomy old woods have ever seen, I should imagine! I was on my way down from seeing you, when I heard the sound of voices—raised, I shrewdly suspect, for my benefit—and when I looked up, there I saw them in the wood just above—a group for a painter's canvas. Which was the most fascinating it would have been hard to say—the youngest Bertemilian, with her starry blue eyes; or the elder, with her golden hair and immense brown eyes, so full of light and fire; or the English girl, sitting impassive on the log behind them. The two Bertemilians are perhaps more brilliant, but the other has a remarkably interesting face, and she looked marvellously picturesque, with her pale face and great dark eyes under a big black hat. But you know them all three, of course—which do you consider the prettiest?'

'I really have not given the matter the attention that it deserves!' replied Adlofstein sardonically, 'and I could hardly give an opinion. I have seen the Bertemilians walking about the town, certainly; but I have only remarked that they were very flighty, ill-bred hussies—stopping to chatter and gossip with every other of the townsfolk they met. As for

the English girl, the only time that I ever saw her I heard her call me an ogre as I went past, so I have not a very favourable opinion of her powers of discrimination.'

St. Evrémonde looked at his tall muscular cousin for a moment, and then went off into fits of laughter.

Adlofstein smiled grimly.

'You seem much tickled by the application of that name to me, my friend,' he observed. 'I suppose you see the force of it?'

'Excuse me,' said St. Evrémonde, recovering himself at last, but shaking with laughter still. 'It was the expression of your face that set me off. You unconsciously assumed such an ogreish air just at that moment. But how can you wonder that those girls should look upon you in that light after the way in which you have behaved to them? You have cut them off from all the society and amusement natural to their age; and it is, of course, a cruel deprivation to them. Your quarrel, whatever it may be, is with the father, not with the girls —but it is the girls whom you persecute and cause to suffer.'

'They are silly, giddy creatures, and they find plenty of amusement in gossiping with the tradespeople. They associate with them

on perfectly equal terms, the Stillenheims tell me, and such society is probably more congenial to them than any other would be.'

'Oh, the Stillenheims!' exclaimed St. Evrémonde in deep disgust. 'If you believe all they say! That Stephanie Stillenheim is the most ill-natured little cat that ever breathed—and she is so infamously old and ugly! I wonder that you can stand her for a single instant, with her faded face and withered figure——'

'You need not run her down because of her looks,' growled Adlofstein. 'She can't help them, or her age either. Age and ugliness are apt to overtake most people some time or other, and they are not crimes.'

'I don't know about that! I consider that they are crimes—almost the worst crimes in a woman. At all events, they are misfortunes, and the woman who is old and ugly should retire into the background and efface herself as much as possible—not flaunt in juvenile attire in the face of day, like Stephanie von Stillenheim. It is really pitiable! And how you can choose to associate with such a poor creature as that when you could have society so much pleasanter is perfectly incomprehensible to me.'

'I dare say. Our tastes in that respect were

never much alike, I think. But that is enough about the Baroness Stephanie. You may talk about something else now.'

'About the Bertemilians, then; they are certainly better worth consideration. I called on them this afternoon,' said St. Evrémonde, with cool insouciance, 'and I found my agreeable anticipations more than realized. I hope to see a good deal of them while I am here, and I shall certainly lose no opportunity of cultivating their acquaintance. I have no quarrel with them, if you have.'

St. Evrémonde had long ago discovered that it did not do to show any fear of offending his cousin, and it was the cynical frankness and perfect fearlessness of his attitude towards him that was the secret of his influence and friendship with him. He had proved the efficacy of this course over and over again, and his calculations did not fail him now. Adlofstein received this declaration of independence in silence. He sat gazing quietly into the fire, with knitted brows, for some minutes; then he looked up, and said mockingly:

'I should be doing Bertemilian a service that he has not deserved from my hands in preventing the introduction of a wolf into his fold. You may go and play havoc as much as

you like, so far as I am concerned. I shall offer no opposition. On the contrary, you have my blessing!'

St. Evrémonde grinned—if a smile which showed such a perfect set of teeth as his could be called a grin. He evidently did not at all object to the imputation, and he said, with a complacent glance at a tall mirror that reflected the view out of the window:

'At all events, you will admit that I am a wolf in sheep's clothing?'

'Oh, certainly; or an ass in a lion's skin, if you prefer—oh, don't feel insulted—a lion in an ass's skin was what I meant, I suppose. What! that does not please you, either? Ah, well, you must not look for compliments from a bear, you see.'

St. Evrémonde's expression had changed more than once during this speech, but at the concluding words he glanced from the graceful figure that interrupted the reflections of mountain and sky and feathery pines to the hard-featured giant frowning into the fire, and he smiled again.

'On the contrary, you are too complimentary,' he said amicably. 'However, I shall endeavour to deserve your good opinion. And now, having obtained your gracious sanction, I think I must take my leave.'

'Won't you stay and see the Baroness? She usually takes her *goûter* about this hour, and she would dispense coffee or chocolate to you with much pleasure, I have no doubt.'

But this invitation St. Evrémonde declined. His refusal was very polite and graceful, but he did not escape without a brutal exposure of the reasons which actuated it.

'Ah!' said Adlofstein dryly, 'I forgot your objections to age and ugliness. I suppose infirmities of mind or body count equally as crimes with you? Well, good-bye.'

When his cousin was gone, Adlofstein, left to his solitude once more, stood without moving for some moments where he was before the hearth, and in every line of his powerful figure weariness and dejection were plainly expressed. His eyes were resting on a portrait which hung over the mantelpiece of carved oak—a young, charming English girl's face, that seemed to smile as the rays of the setting sun shone in through the window and lighted up the clear gray eyes and firm, sweet mouth.

'She remains always beautiful,' he thought, 'and had she lived to grow old, she would always have kept her charm; but the other — how different! My poor father! how could he have been so deluded? Yet, poor thing! she is

greatly to be pitied. She is as solitary as I am, and she rebels against it as I do not. I will go to her this afternoon. I am better to-day, and it will be a kindness to let her exercise her tongue, even if it is only in railing at me.'

And gathering more closely round him the fur wrap which his illness compelled him still to wear, he sallied forth to join his stepmother at her *goûter*, or afternoon tea.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRICKEN BUTTERFLY.

The Baroness von Adlofstein did not look much like the madwoman that Thekla Bertemilian had so uncompromisingly called her, and no one, judging from her appearance, would have supposed that she was anything more than eccentric. She was a little woman, who had once been pretty, with that fairness and roundness which is called *beauté de diable* and is the most perishable of charms, and there were still the remains of elegance in her small features and trim figure. She was little older than her stepson, and the care with which she oiled and dyed her auburn tresses and rouged her thin cheeks seemed to indicate that she had by no means ceased to attach importance to her personal attractions. She always dressed in bright blue, which was the colour in which she

had achieved her greatest successes at the balls to which she had gone as a girl, and it had been impossible to induce her to assume a widow's dress even in the first months of mourning after her husband's death. Indeed, the matter had excited her into such a state of wildness that it had been found necessary to avoid all reference to it from the first, and Adlofstein, whose dislike seemed to have changed into compassion for her deplorable state, had given orders that all her whims should be humoured as far as was possible.

He found her sitting in solitary state in a brilliant blue silk dress that showed up the fadedness of her complexion in terrible relief, before a tea-table covered with shining silver and delicate china. The suite of rooms given up to her use was on the first-floor, and they were more spacious and more luxuriously furnished than any in the Castle. They had, indeed, been fitted up in the English manner by the dead Baron for his first wife, and there were soft rugs and carpets upon the parqueted floor, mirrors and pictures on the walls, and an open fireplace, in which a cheerful fire of pine-logs was burning.

The Baroness looked up with a strange

gleam in her red-brown eyes as her tall stepson entered the room.

'I have come for a cup of coffee, if you will give it me, Baroness,' he said cheerfully. 'One gets tired of sitting alone all day.'

'I was expecting you; I thought you would come to-day,' she said quickly. 'But you had a visitor. Where is he?' and she shifted her position on her chair and looked beyond him, as if she were expecting someone else to appear in the doorway.

'He is gone. It was only St. Evrémonde——'

'St. Evrémonde!' she exclaimed, in an accent of intense vexation and disappointment. 'Why could you not have asked him to look in and see me?'

'I did; but he said that he could not stay.'

'You did not invite him civilly enough. I know your disagreeable, bearish ways, and it is a marvel to me that a gentleman like St. Evrémonde should be able to endure your company for a moment! I would not unless I were forced to. Oh, you can help yourself to cream if you want to! I have poured out your coffee, and I am not your slave that I should wait upon you. Oh, it is terrible, the life I lead

here, seeing nobody and going nowhere! It drives me mad!'

'Why do you go nowhere?' inquired Adlofstein in a conciliatory tone, as he stooped to add cream and sugar to the cup of chilly coffee that the Baroness had given him. 'There is the barouche with the English horses at your service, and you have only to give orders to drive in any direction that you like. Why should you not take some drives while the weather permits it?'

'While you permit it, you mean!' she retorted bitterly. 'It is very kind of you, I am sure; but since you have cut me off from all my friends by spreading abroad false reports—you and your doctors—I have no object in going out, and I do not care to risk my health in this cold weather for nothing. It would suit you well enough if I were to catch cold and die. It would be a very convenient consequence of your kind permission, no doubt; but do not flatter yourself: I do not intend to die, and I may outlive you yet!'

To this speech Adlofstein did not deign to make any reply. He was quite accustomed to such attacks, and he had learnt to listen to them with an unmoved countenance. He had nearly finished his coffee, and was sipping

the last drops of it in somewhat critical fashion.

'What a curious flavour this coffee has, Baroness!' he said. 'I am afraid you are not well served; it ought not to have this bitter taste.'

'It is the best Mocha,' said the Baroness resentfully, 'and I have no fault to find with it. I do not perceive anything wrong with the flavour myself, and if you do, it is probably your own unhealthy state that is to blame. Will you have another cup?'

'No, thank you,' said Adlofstein, setting his cup down, and going to the window.

He stood for a few minutes drumming on the pane, and looking abstractedly out on to the lawns and terraces of the garden all flooded with sunset light.

'Do not make that noise with your fingers, pray; it drives me mad!' exclaimed the Baroness irritably. Adlofstein stopped at once, but she went on with her grievances. 'I suppose that is what you would like above all things, and it is what you and your doctors are aiming at. You think that, if you could only get me out of the way, you would be rid of a troublesome burden, and you would then have your house free to bring a wife into. But

let me tell you, if you are thinking of marrying——'

'Baroness, do not disturb yourself!' said Adlofstein, turning upon her with a stern gaze, under which she quailed. 'Marriage is the last thing that I think of, and in all probability the race of Adlofstein will die out with me.'

'It would be a good thing if it did, I am sure!' she said spitefully. 'If you married, you would most likely only bring on some unfortunate woman the misery that your father did on me. Oh, what a fool I was to marry him! And when I might have done so much better, too! Baron Bertemilian did warn me, but I was a fool, and I would not listen!'

'What warning did Bertemilian give you?' asked Adlofstein, with a contraction of the brows which showed how deeply her random words affected him.

'What business is that of yours? I shall not tell you,' she answered. 'It would do no good if I did, for your house is doomed, and no one of your blood can come to a good end.'

Adlofstein turned away, knowing the utter uselessness of reply or remonstrance, and wondering to himself how it was that one who was scarcely responsible for her words should have the power of inflicting such exquisite pain.

It seemed as if some instinct told her how to say the things that hurt him most ; and, school himself as he would, he was unable to endure it with equanimity. He was not one of those people who seek to spare themselves pain and shrink from unpleasantness, however, and he came from the window and stood by the fire, looking down at her, and listening quietly to the abuse she heaped upon him.

'Now, Baroness,' he said, when she had at last exhausted herself, 'what is the good of going on in this way? I assure you that I have no desire to make your life miserable, and that I entertain no spite or grudge against you. I hated you once, certainly ; but that is all over now. It is wiped out by the calamity which has befallen us both.'

'Both—both!' she broke in scathingly. 'You call it a calamity that has befallen *you*, to have become master in this house, and to have inherited the whole fortune that your father left? A great calamity, truly, and one which gives you cause to mourn! I—*I* have cause, if you like, and I do mourn him—base, wicked scoundrel that he was to leave me dependent upon an unnatural son like you!'

Adlofstein's eyes flashed dangerously at the epithets that she applied to his father.

'You may abuse me as much as you please, Baroness, but in my presence you must refrain from saying anything against my father. It is mere raving, I know; but I will not stand it. You will please not mention his name before me. Remember that.'

She was cowed for a moment, and she shrank in a heap in her chair, not daring to say a word. She had never roused him to such anger before, and the tone of his voice seemed to strike her like a blow.

'Now, listen to me,' he went on, still holding her in check by the stern glance of his terrible gray eyes. 'It is useless to argue or reason with you, I know, and I don't often do it; but now, once for all, I ask you, what is your grievance? Make but one reasonable, straightforward request, and if it is in my power to gratify it, I will.'

'I want back what I have lost by taking your hateful name!' she said passionately. 'Give me back my youth, my beauty, my reputation, and my happiness—give it all back, if you can! Then, and not till then, will your father's debt be paid.'

'You know that you are not speaking reasonably now. It was your own choice to enter this family, and I had no part or share in it. I

opposed it to the uttermost, and I can do nothing to undo the consequences of your own act. But if this place is full of painful memories and associations for you, there is no reason why you should stay here. You shall go away——'

'No, no, no!—and again no!' the Baroness almost screamed. 'I will not go away! You shall not drive me from here! That is what you want, and are always aiming at, I know; but you shall not do it! I will go to every house in Lindenthal, if you do, and tell of your cruelty and heartlessness. I have borne it long, but even the worm will turn at last.'

'There is no occasion for the worm to trouble itself in this instance,' remarked Adlofstein, with a cynical smile. 'You are welcome to stay in this house as long as you please, for the sake of my father who loved you. I have not the slightest wish to turn you out, if you would only believe it. I was only going to suggest that a change to Wiesbaden, or some other watering-place you might fancy—the expenses of which I would, of course, defray—might do you good.'

'I will not stir from here,' said the Baroness obstinately. 'I know better! When you had once got me away, I might not find it so easy

to come back. No; I am not to be got rid of so easily, thank you!'

'Then, would you like someone to come and stay with you here? It is clear to me that my society only irritates you, and that the greatest kindness I can do you is to keep out of your way as much as possible; but it is, as you say, a very melancholy life that you live all alone. Shall I seek out some lady who might be willing to come and live with you as a companion——'

'To be a spy upon all my actions! No, no; I will not have her. You are very cunning, Louis, but you don't deceive me. I am up to all your dodges. This is a new one—to get a spy, or a keeper to guard me; but I see through it. And, I tell you, it is no use your getting such a creature. If she comes, she will not stay for a single day. I shall make her life unbearable to her. I shall know how to chase her away!'

It was quite hopeless, Adlofstein saw, and, losing patience at last, he said coldly:

'Well, I see that there is nothing to be done for you—by me, at any rate. And since you regard every one of my proposals as a scheme against you, and repel my offers of kindness with insult and contumely, I have no other

course left but to let you alone. I will not trouble you with any more visits. Good-night.'

He moved away, but the Baroness's mood changed suddenly, and she called to him to come back before he had reached the door.

'Wait, Louis, wait; there is something I want to ask of you,' she said in wheedling tones. 'Wait one moment till I ask it. You promised that if it was a reasonable request you would grant it.'

'What is it?' he asked briefly.

'I don't want you to give up your visits to me. I want you to come and see me at this time of the afternoon, and take your coffee with me every day that you are well enough.'

'And will you always entertain me as pleasantly as you have done to-day?' inquired Adlofstein cynically. 'In that case, I think that, for your sake as well as my own, I should have to refuse, for it cannot be good for you to have such passions excited every day.'

'The passions are there always—always!' said the Baroness, clasping her hands tightly to her breast. 'And it is a relief to me to let them come out sometimes. You must bear with me, Louis—for your father's sake you

might; and you know my moods are not always like this.'

'No; not always. This has been a climax, certainly! But if I exercise such an irritating effect upon your nerves, it must be better that I should keep away.'

'No, no; I should die if I saw no one but my servants. You must come. I feel better after you have been here. I am better now. I must have some vent for my feelings.'

Adlofstein smiled sardonically, but he said nothing.

'You will come?' she said, with a gleam of triumph in her eyes. 'You don't want to, I see, but you will do it.'

'Yes, I will come, since you wish it,' he said, not too graciously; and then, bidding her good-night with a formal bow, he left the room.

'Is it madness, or is it badness?' he asked himself, as he re-ascended the winding stair that led to his rooms in the turret. 'I suppose that is a question on which even a specialist would be puzzled to decide, and in all probability it is a mixture of both. In these cases of unstable nervous equilibrium, when the patient gets thrown off his balance, it is impossible to know how far he is responsible for what he says or does. Sometimes I am ready to doubt

whether her behaviour is in any way connected with the disease of her mind; and yet—yet, who can tell how far-reaching might not be the effects of that sudden enormous expenditure of nerve-force?'

It was this belief—the conviction that the Baroness's deplorable condition had been brought about by the shock of having witnessed his father's sudden death—that was the secret of the forbearance and compassion with which Adlofstein regarded her. His patience had been severely tried by this last interview, and he looked forward to the continuance of such scenes with anything but agreeable anticipations. Yet when he gave the required promise, he did it with the full intention of keeping it.

'Poor thing! she cannot help herself,' he thought, as he took up the book that he had been reading. 'It is not fair that she should be shunned and despised because the worst of all human misfortunes has overtaken her. She was but a butterfly, and perhaps if she had not married into this ill-fated house she might be in possession of all her faculties still.'

He sighed heavily once or twice, and then tried to forget his cares in the study of a subject which had a deep and personal interest for him. But he found that he was unable to

concentrate his thoughts. A strange restlessness and excitement came over him, which made it impossible to fix his attention on the page before him. He was oppressed with a vague sense of impending evil that he could not shake off, and presently he became conscious of an inability to control his nerves that he had never experienced before.

'Am I, too, going mad?' he asked himself with a horrible stricken sensation of the heart. 'Has it come already?' and as he felt all power of motion going from him, he reached out for the bell and rang violently for his servant.

The man came in less than two minutes; but when he entered the room he found his master lying on the floor, twisted up in agony and incapable of speech or motion.

All that night Adlofstein was battling for his life, and the doctor, who was summoned in haste, could give him no relief. For many days his life was despaired of, and the Baroness had to drink her coffee in solitude.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN AFTERNOON CALL.

'Now, Melanie, this is a good opportunity of doing some work. Now that the snow is coming down, we can be getting on with our lessons, for afterwards I know you will want to be out skating and sledging all day.'

November had come, with the snow and frost so eagerly anticipated by the Bertemilians, and one snowy afternoon, when the well-heated, double-windowed rooms seemed particularly cosy and comfortable in contrast with the inclemency of the weather outside, Evangela was improving the unshining hour by drilling the luckless Melanie in the pronunciation of all the English words which she could not master.

'Your "th" is your weak point,' she said, 'but I have thought of a capital exercise which will soon teach you. You must learn it,' and she repeated rapidly :

'I thrust my thick thumb through thirty-three thousand thick thorny thistles;
Through thirty-three thousand thick thorny thistles I thrust my thick thumb;
If I thrust my thick thumb through thirty-three thousand thick thorny thistles,
Where are the thirty-three thousand thick thorny thistles I thrust my thick thumb through?'

'*Oh je!*' said Melanie; but she began hopefully: '"I dust my dick dumb trough dirty-tree tousand dick dorny distles!"' Then, as a peal of laughter from Evangela interrupted her, she began again with anxious pains: '"I zust my zick zumb zoo zirty-free zousand zick zorny fistles."'

This was no better, and try as hard as she would, she could not get over the difficulty. Evangela went into convulsions of unsympathetic mirth, and Melanie, declaring that the exercise was a diabolical invention, which would certainly send her mad in the end, was beginning to lose patience, when Thekla, from her favourite post at the window, created a sudden diversion.

'Oh, ah, oh! Children, come quick! Here is St. Evrémonde coming up the street.'

Both the girls flew to the window to verify this interesting fact, and their excitement was increased by the perception that the Marquis was coming to their house.

'Oh, my dear children,' cried Melanie, 'he is

really coming in, and I must fly to the kitchen and tell Lina to prepare a nice little *goûter*, and bring it in before he goes. I will not be long, and you two can entertain him till I come.'

She flew off; but Thekla would not stay without her. She declared that she must arrange her hair and 'make toilette,' and so Evangela was left to receive the Marquis by herself.

She was still standing by the window when he was shown in, and he came up to her with a smile.

'I thought I saw one of you as I came up the road,' he said, after his first polite greeting. 'You have a view of all the traffic that goes on between the country and the town from here, have you not?'

'Yes,' said Evangela, 'and I find it very amusing to watch the peasants. They are so unlike the poor people of our country. They are more picturesque; but I should think they must be much poorer, and lead far harder lives. It is shocking to see how old and worn-out the women get to look; at thirty they appear like ancient hags, all bent and withered.'

'It is the hard out-of-door work that they are compelled to slave at, in order to make their little plots of ground pay. I have heard my cousin Adlofstein say how much better the

condition of affairs is in England. It is a subject that he raves about. But in England the Jews are not so rampant as they are here. They flourish everywhere in this country at the expense of the peasants.'

'Whose fault is that?' asked Evangela, looking at him with her thoughtful dark eyes, which seemed always seeking for information. 'Do you think it is the fault of the Jews, or of the peasants?'

St. Evrémonde laughed lightly.

'I don't know,' he said. 'Most people don't stop to ask whose fault it is—they merely abuse the Jews.'

'Yes, I have noticed that,' said Evangela. 'It is an easy way of disposing of the question. I am sorry for the peasants; but I think I am still more sorry for the Jews. It must be so terrible for a proud people like them to be treated as they are in this country, as if they were pariahs, utterly beyond the pale of sympathy. Fancy! if you were a Jew, what would you feel to find yourself so shunned and scorned that, in the grand chain of the quadrille *à la cour*, the ladies, who dance with everybody else, would refuse to touch your hand?'

'*Mon Dieu*, mademoiselle! I could not imagine such a thing! But you are like my

cousin of Adlofstein. He is quite a champion of the Jews, and he is for ever crusading on their behalf. I suppose it must be an English characteristic. But as for the difficulties of the peasants, it is this new land-system that he blames; and though it is scarcely my interest to do so, I am obliged to acknowledge that he makes out a black case against us. Still, there is something to be said on our side, too, and we have hot arguments about it very often.'

'How is Baron Adlofstein now?' asked Evangela, with sudden interest. 'We heard that he had had a relapse, and was terribly ill again.'

'He was indeed! It came on quite suddenly one evening after I had been with him in the afternoon. He seemed so much better, I thought, and he thought so himself; but towards evening there came on new and alarming symptoms, and he had an attack in the night which was worse than anything that he had ever had before. They did not think he would live; but he has enormous strength, and a constitution of iron, and he struggled through. He is recovering now, and unless another attack comes on, he will soon be able to go out, I imagine. He sent to ask me to

come and see him this afternoon, and I am, in fact, on my way to him now.'

'Have you seen him since this last illness?'

'Once, for a few minutes, yes; and he does not look so much shattered as I should have expected from Hempel's account. I have been advising him to send for a doctor from Vienna, for I don't believe this man understands his case. It seems to be a very extraordinary one, and the symptoms of this attack were so different from the last, that Hempel confesses himself at fault. What was the long name he called it? Oh, *tetanus idiopathicus*, I think it was. In French we call it *trisme*.'

'Lock-jaw?' said Evangela, with a startled glance. 'I did not know that could happen without some wound or injury to bring it on.'

'It is very rare, but it does sometimes happen, Hempel says; and in a case like this, where the family history is what it is—but these are melancholy details to be troubling you with,' said Evrémonde, arresting himself suddenly, as he realized the unexpected direction in which the conversation was drifting.

Melanie and Thekla came in at this point, and, over the dainty little refection which was brought in afterwards, the talk was very light and gay and amusing. The almond cakes, meringues,

and coffee were excellent; the two pretty girls, smiling and sparkling in their naïve desire to please, were charming, and St. Evrémonde spent an exceedingly agreeable half-hour; yet when later on in the afternoon he went on his way to Schloss Adlofstein, it was not the piquant and flattering little attentions of Melanie and Thekla that lingered in his mind, but the conversation which he had had before with the English cousin. What an intensity of feeling there was in her pale and serious face! what a glow of interest had flashed out of her dark eyes when he had been speaking of his cousin! She had not looked impassive then. Was she interested in Adlofstein? But no; that was not likely. It was probably only that she looked upon him as a sort of ogre, and was interested in hearing about him on that account. St. Evrémonde recalled the epithet that Adlofstein had repeated to him, and, as he thought of it, he laughed again at the recollection.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOUL OF THE SON.

ADLOFSTEIN had not, as his cousin half expected to find, had a relapse; but he was looking desperately ill as he lay with his great length extended on a sofa drawn up to the fire, and the smile and feverish flush on his face could not hide the havoc that had been wrought there by the consuming mental and bodily anguish he had been through.

'No, I am not worse,' he said, in answer to St. Evrémonde's exclamation of concern, as he raised himself painfully from his recumbent position, and extended a gaunt and burning hand. 'Indeed, Hempel says that I am astonishingly better, and on the high road to recovery—but I don't know. It is as well to be prepared for the worst, and I have been taking certain steps this morning. I wanted to consult you, and I have been expecting you

all the afternoon. You couldn't come earlier, I suppose?'

'I didn't know that there was any hurry, and I turned in to see the Bertemilians on my way,' said St. Evrémonde apologetically.

'Ah!' said Adlofstein, his brows meeting in a heavy frown. 'Well, never mind the Bertemilians now. It is on a matter of business that I want to speak to you, Victor. I have had the notary here this morning, and I have made my will.'

'Your will!' ejaculated St. Evrémonde in surprise. 'But, my dear Louis, there can be no necessity—you surely cannot think——'

'Pooh!' said Adlofstein. 'Everybody must die some time, and I shall not die any the sooner for having made my will, I suppose? It is always better to make all arrangements of that sort in good time; and in my case especially—even if I live, I may not always be able—— I suppose,' he said, interrupting himself suddenly, 'you will admit that I am in full possession of my faculties now?'

'My dear fellow,' said St. Evrémonde in shocked surprise, 'of course you are! As much so as any man I know.'

'Well, it is just as well for you that I am, since by the will that I made this morning you

will be the chief person to benefit. Stop, stop! Let me explain. Then you will see that there is not so very much to be grateful for. You know that I am the last of my line. There is no one to come after me of my name, and I am free to leave my property as I choose. I choose to leave it to you, for reasons that I will make clear to you. You are not a very near relation, but still, through your grandmother you have our blood in your veins; and, except that gambler, Graf Brandenberg, whom I detest, there is no one nearer that I know of. You have undoubted talents, which only need the aid of wealth and standing to raise you to the high position that you covet; and you have health and strength with which to found a new branch of the family on the ruins of this one.'

'Louis,' stammered St. Evrémonde, 'why do you talk like this? You are young, and you may marry——'

'No,' said Adlofstein, almost sternly; 'I shall not. You know that I shall not. My race will end with me. And since Adlofstein and Greifenburg must pass out of our family, I would rather they went to you than to anyone else. There will not be much besides, however. The Baroness has to be provided for; and there are

other legacies which I wish to leave which will swallow up the greater part of my invested fortune. You will have the estates and the houses, with all the plate, jewels, and furniture—and I have made you residuary legatee, so that there will probably be something for you to have in hand, but all the rest goes in legacies. Here is the rough draft that the notary left, if you care to look over it.'

St. Evrémonde took the paper that his cousin handed him ; but his senses were so dazzled and confused that he could hardly take in the words. This calmly-made announcement took him completely by surprise, and he could with difficulty control the agitation which he felt.

The friendship between the cousins—they were second cousins only—was one of long standing, and the generosity with which the richer man had always been ready to assist the wants of the other had probably had something to do with its continuance. St. Evrémonde, who was a younger son, and had nothing to hope from his elder brother, the possessor of the family estates down in Southern Hungary, had always appreciated this solid factor in their friendship at its full worth ; but such an outcome as this he had not anticipated. He had

not known that Adlofstein had the power to appoint his heir; and that he should be chosen had never entered into his wildest dreams. He was genuinely taken by surprise, and the sincerity of his emotion gave a grace to his expressions of gratitude against which even Adlofstein's cynicism could not be altogether proof. Adlofstein was moved; but he could not endure any display of emotion.

'Pray don't overwhelm me with gratitude,' he said, with characteristic *brusquerie*. 'There is really no special occasion, for it costs me no more to put down your name than that of any other person. Well, have you read that paper? You see what I wish to be done for the Baroness and for Stephanie Stillenheim?'

'Yes,' said St. Evrémonde, who had indeed seen their names among the other legatees, though he had scarcely realized any provisions, except that one astounding one which concerned himself.

'You will see that my wishes are carried out, won't you? And, Victor, when I am gone, there will be no one to look after the poor Baroness, and you know her pitiable condition. Would it be too much of a burden to you to look after her a little—to see that she is happily placed, and not ill treated in any way——'

'Of course—of course,' said St. Evrémonde hastily; 'anything that I can do—you may depend upon me. But, my dear Louis, I really cannot bear to hear you talking in this funereal way—as if you were not likely to live for years after the Baroness and me, too! You have a magnificent physique, and a constitution of iron—old Hempel says so—and you will soon get over this little attack. You should not let your mind dwell on these gloomy thoughts.'

'There are more gloomy possibilities than death,' said Adlofstein calmly; 'but I assure you I have no morbid ideas on the subject, only I think it advisable to make provision for a contingency which is, after all, not so very far away from any of us; and then, if death or disaster should come, I should be able to face it with a quiet mind.'

'Of course, life is very uncertain for us all,' St. Evrémonde said, uttering the well-worn aphorism, as men do, without the slightest personal application. The perception of this brought a gleam of amusement into Adlofstein's keen gray eyes, and the corners of his mouth betrayed an inclination to smile as he looked at him; but he said gravely enough:

'Yes, and there is no greater certainty than Death, though he often comes last to those who

would welcome him most, and first to those who dread him. There seems a strange fatality about that sometimes.'

St. Evrémonde shuddered.

'I detest this talk about death!' he said impatiently, 'and I am sure, my friend, that it is not good for you. Let us speak of something more cheerful. Have you heard about this ice-carnival which the townspeople are going to get up? They say that the ice holds already, and as soon as the snow clears away there will be excellent skating. You will be able to get out soon, and you will be surprised to find what a difference fresh air and exercise will make to your spirits.'

Adlofstein laughed at the tangent at which St. Evrémonde had gone off in his eagerness to get away from a gloomy subject; but he was very weary, and he had said as much as he wished to, so he listened resignedly. He tried to find a more comfortable position on his sofa, and to shift the cushions so as to lean back and obtain a little ease; but his efforts were plainly unsuccessful, and at last St. Evrémonde jumped up and came to his aid.

'Hadn't you better lie down?' he asked, with unwonted consideration. 'I don't believe that you ought to have been sitting up all this

time. You look tired to death. *Oh je!* how desperately heavy you are!'

St. Evrémonde was under difficulties in acting nurse to his big cousin; and when he tried to support him, his arm gave way suddenly under the immense weight. He let him slip with a jerk on to the sofa, and, jarred through every nerve, Adlofstein lay helpless, with beads of perspiration breaking out on his forehead.

'It does not matter,' he gasped, in answer to St. Evrémonde's expressions of regret. 'I ought to have told you to ring for Rudolf—but there is no harm done. Now, if you would put some of those cushions under my head—thank you.'

St. Evrémonde poked and prodded at the cushions with more goodwill than science; and then he busied himself in propping his cousin up with a solicitude and concern which sat very oddly upon him. Adlofstein, if he had not been in such pain, would have received with derision the little pats and pokes all over him which St. Evrémonde appeared to think would be consoling and reassuring; but the Marquis was rather proud of himself in his new *rôle*, and he had been so much touched by Adlofstein's selection of him as his heir that it was a relief to him to find some vent for his feelings. He

pressed Adlofstein's hand affectionately, and he would have liked to have embraced him; but, fortunately for Adlofstein, the remembrance of the cynical views and idiosyncrasies that came from his English descent and education occurred to him in time to stop him, and he desisted.

'If you only had some amusing books to read!' he said, drawing the little table heaped up with books within reach of the sofa. 'These are such terribly dull volumes that you have got here: Schopenhauer, Kant, Weismann, and a lot of English books—desperately learned all of them, I have no doubt. One would really suppose that you were working up for an examination! These plays of Ibsen's are the only readable things in the whole collection, and I am sure they are dull enough! Now, if you had some French romances to distract your mind a little—I have got some of Zola's and De Maupassant's with me: shall I send them?'

'No, thank you; it isn't the sort of literature that appeals to me,' said Adlofstein, smiling faintly. 'Thank you—thank you. Never mind those cushions—you have really done as much as you can for me now. If you would not mind ringing for Rudolf! Shall I tell him to bring up any refreshment for you?'

'Thank you, no. They will have got dinner for me at Greifenburg, and I think I ought not to stay with you any longer. You seem tired.'

Adlofstein was tired, and he did not press his cousin to stay; but as St. Evrémonde was going he detained him for a moment.

'There is one more thing that I wished to say to you,' he said. 'Before we leave this subject that we have been speaking of to-night, I want one assurance from you. Of course, you will take over my name in addition to your own when the estates of Adlofstein come to you, and with the name you will take the motto and crest. You know what that is?'

'Of course—"I hold fast mine honour."'

'Yes; and will you do it? Promise me that you will always act up to that.'

'Of course I will; I can safely promise you that,' said St. Evrémonde in a tone almost of offence 'Can you doubt it?'

'If I did, do you think that I should have placed the trust in you that I have done?' asked Adlofstein. 'But promise, all the same—and promise me, too, that you will regard as your own the interests of the country-people and dependents who will come under you;' and in his gray eyes, as they looked into St. Evrémonde's, there was a searching intensity which

seemed able to see straight into the most secret depths of the other's soul.

'I promise,' said St. Evrémonde, with his hand in Adlofstein's burning grasp; but as he gave the promise he felt a sudden overwhelming sense of discomfort and annoyance, and he scarcely knew how to endure that searching gaze.

It was a relief to him to get away. He hurried down the stairs, and it was not until he was well outside the Castle that he felt able to indulge in the glad exultation of pleasant anticipation that possessed his soul. As he looked forth upon the fair domain that belonged to Adlofstein, and thought of the many miles of fields and forests that stretched away over the mountains, the knowledge of the probability—nay, the certainty almost—that the time would come when it would be all his, was like a draught of strong wine warming his heart and making his brain whirl. Of course, when he came to think of it, it was not so very much that Adlofstein had done for him. He had to leave this splendid inheritance to somebody, and why not to his only friend? It was only an intention that he had to be grateful for; but still he was grateful, and the approbation of his conscience on that score, together with the

exhilaration of having such a glorious prospect to look to in the future, lifted him up to the seventh heaven of blissful satisfaction. To the position of the man whose clouded hopes and shortened chances of life were the occasion of his expectations, it did not occur to him to give much thought ; but it is so common a thing in this world for one man's gain to spring from another man's loss that this was scarcely strange. St. Evrémonde went his way rejoicing through the woods that he knew were one day to be his own, and Adlofstein was left to spend the long winter evening in solitude and pain of mind and body.

Rudolf, the old butler, who was the only attendant whom Adlofstein would tolerate as a sick-nurse, came up in answer to the summons of St. Evrémonde's ring, carrying a cup of beef-tea which it was time for his master to take. But, exhausted though he was, Adlofstein would not touch it, and he motioned it away in impatience and irritation. All the entreaties and remonstrances of the old man were unavailing, and all he could do was to set the tray on one side, hoping that the Baron would take something of his own accord in his own time. He made up the fire, drew the curtains, and lighted the lamps ; and then, having settled the sick man

in a more comfortable position than that in which St. Evrémonde had left him, he prepared to withdraw.

'The Herr Baron would not care to have Johann come up to read the paper to him for half an hour?' he said tentatively from the door.

He had observed the expression of his master's face, and the heartache that he felt at having to leave him to his lonely wretchedness emboldened him to suggest the only distraction that he could think of. Johann was the head-forester, and he enjoyed the proud distinction in the Castle household of being able to read; but his reading was a lame and stumbling performance, and Adlofstein smiled grimly at the thought of it.

'No,' he said uncompromisingly; 'I want no one. I only wish to be left in peace.'

But peace was far from him that night. It had been far from him for many a day; but in the full enjoyment of perfect physical health and strength he had been able hitherto to hold at bay that haunting dread which hung like a heavy cloud over his mental horizon. He had instinctively felt that constant occupation was his best safeguard against it, and he had exerted himself to read, to write, and to look after the

business of his estate with untiring energy. Even then he could not entirely secure himself against the intrusion of depressing and embittering thoughts; and now, in the weakness and illness that had come from his physical breakdown, he was their helpless prey.

He had made a great effort to overcome the selfish indifference as to what should happen after his death that had been inspired by his misery, and he had forced himself against his inclination to consider the interests of others, and to make the best disposition of his property that seemed possible; but now that this was done, the chilly mist seemed to rise about his heart again, and with his indifference, his hopelessness, and his gloom, there mingled a poisoning element of anger, rebellion, and envy.

Why should he be called upon to suffer like this, when other men, whose deserts were certainly not more, were allowed to go scot-free? Why, without his own consent, without any power of helping himself, and without hope of relief, should he have been placed in the world to bear a load of misery which was the punishment of other men's sins? The world-old questions, under which tormented human souls have writhed in impotent rebellion from

century to century, were torturing him now, and he could find no gleam of hope or comfort.

As he lay solitary and motionless on his sofa through the long hours of the evening in a deadly sickness of soul that made reading or any other employment impossible, there came into his mind, with strange vividness and persistency, some of the teaching of his English mother, who had been dead for so many years. Under the breath of science, and the hard personal experiences of his later years, these early beliefs had gradually and imperceptibly faded, till they had become like myths that he reverenced only for the sake of their associations. But the faith planted in childhood is apt to die hard; and disgusted philosophers have questioned whether it is possible ever to eradicate entirely from the mind those impressions made upon the plastic material in infancy and childhood, through the baleful influence of religious mothers and nurses. Those early-sown seeds, after lying dormant for half a lifetime, have the power of springing to the light and bearing fruit when we least expect; and now, in the darkness of a gloom which philosophy could not lighten and science could not alleviate, there came to Adlofstein, with the strange faint fragrance of some

living thing, the remembrance of the simple trusting beliefs that had seemed so all-sufficient in his far-back childhood.

Among the English books which lined the walls of the room was a little old English Bible which had been brought to Adlofstein by Adlofstein's mother when she had come there as a bride. It had been out of that well-worn little black book that she had taught her little boy; and seized with a sudden impulse to look into it once again, Adlofstein dragged himself painfully across the room, and took it out of its place. On the first page was a faded inscription in delicate sloping characters, and he stood with the book in his hand, and paused long over the pathetic record of personalities that had for ever passed away; then, as bodily pain and weakness asserted themselves, he returned to his sofa, and, opening the book in the middle, began to read here and there in desultory fashion.

For a long time there was no sound in the room but the crackling of the wood-fire and the rustling of the pages, as Adlofstein turned them quickly over; but at last his attention was arrested by a passage in Ezekiel, and his eyes devoured the words:

'Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of

the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right . . . he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live. . . . The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.'

'Ah, if it were so—if it only were so!' said Adlofstein, a cry of intense bitterness and distress breaking from him. 'But it is not, and cannot be. There is no escape from the pitiless and inexorable natural laws, and it is the other verdict that they endorse: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The iniquity of the father *is* visited in the bosom of the son; it goes on into the third and fourth generation—yes, and further. How many generations ago is it that that curse was brought down upon our house? It hangs like a sword over my head now, and it may descend at any moment; perhaps this agony of horror and revolt means that it is descending even now. Oh, my God! my brain reels; what will the end be?'

He reached out for the bell that Rudolf had put near him, and rang it violently.

'Give me the morphia, Rudolf,' he said, when the old man, breathless and anxious, made his appearance, 'and give me the full dose. I must sleep to-night, or I shall go mad!'

CHAPTER X.

GOATS VERSUS SHEEP.

WINTER had fairly settled down upon Lindenthal; the snow lay three feet deep upon the ground, and the sun shone brightly every day from the clear skies on the dazzling landscape. The Eis-platz, a lake artificially formed in the pleasure-grounds by the river, was reflooded every night; and every morning the Bertemilians had all to themselves the great sheet of glassy, untouched ice that lay under the trees. In the afternoons it was the resort of the whole town, and it was especially crowded on Wednesdays and Saturdays, when the band played in the little wooden pavilion in the trees; but the most festive occasions of all were when the leading spirits of the town got up an *Eisfest*, or evening fête, upon the ice. This would only occur once or twice in the season; and when Melanie and Thekla heard

that a *Kostümirtes Eisfest* on an especially grand scale was in prospect, they became wild with anxiety to go to it.

'Ah! if you only knew what the fête was like, with the music, and the illuminations, and all the charming costumes!' sighed Thekla, one sunny morning when they were skating by themselves, and Evangela had been expressing her delight in the sense of swift motion. 'This is tame, and flat, and stupid in comparison, and you would never be contented with it again.'

'In that case I had better remain satisfied in a state of ignorance which is bliss,' laughed Evangela; 'but I don't suppose that I should enjoy it so very much, after all. You see, I am only a beginner, and I like to have more elbow-room than one would be likely to get with the music playing and everyone here.'

'Oh, but, Vangela, you are getting on beautifully! Everyone says it is really astonishing, considering that you have only begun this winter. Think only, you skate quite as well as papa now, and he has been skating for six years. St. Evrémonde was remarking yesterday upon the progress that you had made, and he said that it was another illustration of English pluck.'

'M. de St. Evrémonde can pour out compli-

ments as easily as you can blow bubbles out of soapy water, and they are worth about as much!' said Evangela, with some disdain. 'They are beautiful, but empty!'

'You are so terribly severe upon poor St. Evrémonde; and, indeed, it appears to me, upon all men,' remonstrated Melanie. 'I assure you, he was really struck by your fearlessness, and you know everyone else says the same. You are now quite enough at home on your skates to be able to skate round with anybody, and I know that you would immensely enjoy this *Eisfest*. It is such a pity that papa will never come. He used always to take us before this wretched quarrel with Adlofstein arose.'

'If you would only drop a hint, Vangela, that you would like to see an *Eisfest*, I believe it would be enough,' said Thekla. 'He attends to what you say, and I believe he would come if you were to ask him.'

Evangela was willing enough, and she proffered her request that same day at luncheon, with a result that completely justified Thekla's diplomacy. The Baron looked at her for a moment with contracted eyebrows and a twinkle in the blue eyes underneath them, and then inquired when the *Eisfest* was to take place.

'On Wednesday, next week,' the quaking Thekla put in promptly; and when her father signified an amiable consent, she could scarcely contain her joy.

From that time up to the day of the fête, the girls were hard at work upon the Polish costumes that they decided upon wearing. They were all three dressed alike—Melanie insisted on that—and when they appeared in the quaint three-cornered black velvet caps, or *Confederatkas*, trimmed with fur and jewelled aigrettes, and their close-fitting, heavily-braided costumes, the effect was so good that Melanie confidently predicted that there would be no one to eclipse them.

The night of the fête was fine—a lovely moonlight night, without a cloud in the sky or a breath of wind in the air, and at seven o'clock the delighted girls, escorted by the Baron, were making their way through the sparkling snow to the Eis-platz.

When they reached the Anlagen, the scene that met their eyes was one of bewildering strangeness and prettiness. The lake was transformed into an *al-fresco* ballroom, and the inspiriting music, the gay laughter, and the brilliant effects of light, were all intensified in effect by the keen freshness of the bracing night

air. Coloured lights were shining in every branch and twig of the trees ; the pavilion was outlined with blue and green, and all round the banks of the lake were burning great bonfires, whose lurid light contrasted strangely with the pale ethereal radiance of the moonlit woods beyond, and threw into strong relief the fantastic figures flitting past.

There were a great many people on the ice, and after Melanie and Evangela had skated round once together, they stood still for a few minutes at the top of the lake, trying to make out who was present whom they knew.

'St. Evrémonde is here,' said Thekla, circling gracefully up to them. 'I thought he would be, for I saw him in the town this afternoon, and told him we were coming. Look! there he is, skating with the Stillenheim. Isn't she a fright in that awful old jacket that she has tacked a few bits of braid on to form a *Hussaren-Kostüm!* It gives her no figure whatever ; and, then, she skates so ungracefully—all on the inside edge, and with that hideous little kick-out every time.'

'Oh, Thekla, have mercy!' cried Evangela, laughing. 'It is not everybody who can master the outside edge as you do.'

'Oh, I am not such a shining light,' said Thekla, with some complacency, however, for

she knew that her performance, so far as it went, was the perfection of grace. 'If you want to see good skating, you should look at St. Evrémonde; he is really worth watching.'

'He is not the best here to-night, though,' said Melanie, who had been gazing intently into the whirling crowd. 'Who is that tall, heavy man doing the spiral circles over there? The Marquis could not do that; don't you remember, he was trying the other day, and he could not manage it at all? Look, he is coming this way! Oh, Thekla, it is Adlofstein! I did not know he was out again. I never thought he would be here: I wish he were not!'

'I don't care a bit,' said Thekla defiantly, 'so long as his presence does not prevent St. Evrémonde from coming with us, and I don't believe it will. Ah, no; here he comes! I thought he would soon give up Mdlle. de Stillenheim when he found out that we were here.'

St. Evrémonde came up out of the crowd—a most graceful apparition—and smilingly engaged Melanie to skate with him. Thekla went off with one of her girl friends from the town; and, wishing to practise her paces in peace, Evangela looked about for a quiet corner where she could see the gay scene without danger of being

knocked down by the crowd. She had learnt enough by this time to be able to go straight ahead with plenty of confidence and dash ; and St. Evrémonde had several times asked her to skate with him ; but she had a horror of spoiling anyone's fun, and she generally managed to avoid him on the ice.

From her dark nook, under the shelter of the trees, she saw St. Evrémonde skim past with Melanie, and a smile crossed her face as she watched them.

'How bright Melanie's eyes are!' she thought, 'and how well they go together! I really must try that outside circle ; I expect it only wants a little confidence ;' and she was about to essay her experiment, when she saw a tall, heavy man, wrapped up to the eyes in furs, come lunging down at full speed in her direction. She recognized Adlofstein, and thought she would wait until he had gone past ; but in a moment she saw that he was dashing right down upon her. She tried to get out of his way ; but before she could decide which way to move, he was upon her, and had sent her crashing down. She fell on her back, and with such force that she went spinning along the ice until the bushes stopped her, and then she lay for a moment or two half stunned.

When she opened her eyes, she saw that Adlofstein was bending over her, and trying to lift her up. He inquired anxiously in German if she were hurt; but she rejected his proffered aid, and scrambled to her feet with more speed than grace.

'No, I am not hurt,' she said, with a flash of indignation in her eyes. 'No, thank you, I do not need your help; I can stand alone quite well.'

She believed that he had knocked her over on purpose, and she felt so angry that she could hardly speak. But one of her skates had been loosened in the fall, and she was so shaken that she was very unsteady on her feet, and Adlofstein did not relax his grasp upon her arm.

'You must sit down and rest,' he said imperatively. 'There is a bench close by here; allow me to help you to it;' and holding her arm above the elbow by one hand, he placed his arm behind her back, and swept her forward with a force that she could not resist.

'Oh, stop, stop!' she cried imploringly. 'My skate is coming off; I shall fall again!' and she would have been down, if it had not been for the supporting arm of the ogre Baron.

'Never mind your skate. Just put your two feet together, and go where I drive you,' he said; and the next moment he had deposited her in safety on a bench at the edge of the lake under the trees.

Evangela was so shaken and bewildered by the fall and the extraordinary situation, that she felt as if she must be in a bad dream, and she scarcely took in the apologies that Adlofstein was making.

'What made you do it?' she asked, looking up at last with a flash of resentment in her eyes as her first impression recurred to her.

'What made me do it?' he repeated blankly; and then, as he realized the accusation implied, he said vehemently: 'Good heavens, Fräulein! don't you hear me explain that it was that I did not see you? My eyes were dazzled by the lights, and you were in the dark. Do you suppose that I would knock any woman down on purpose?'

A fierce ray of light from a bonfire shining redly through the pale moonlight illuminated Adlofstein's countenance as he spoke, and in the gray depths of the stern eyes looking straight into hers there was a steely light that was very alarming. Evangela realized that she had wronged him, and she suddenly felt hot all over.

'I beg your pardon,' she said hurriedly. 'If it was an accident, it does not matter. I am not hurt at all.'

To prove her words, and cut short an interview which made her feel exceedingly uncomfortable, she rose, and tried to skate away; but at the first step she stumbled, and she was obliged to turn and subside again upon the bench. She had forgotten that one of her skates was loose. It had now come right off, and, as she sat down again, it fell with a jingle on to the ice.

'If you will allow me, I will fasten on your skate again,' said Adlofstein quietly, and, before she could prevent him, he had picked it up, and was kneeling on the ice with her foot in his hand.

'Please don't take the trouble,' said Evangela, in a sort of desperation. 'My friends will be coming round directly, and I am in no sort of hurry to go on skating. I wish you would not do it.'

'The skate is small, but it is not small enough for your foot, apparently,' said Adlofstein, choosing to disregard these very plain hints. 'Have you got your key with you?'

'Yes, I have; but it does not matter. I do

not think I shall care to skate much more,' answered Evangela.

'Perhaps I can manage with mine,' he said coolly, as she showed no inclination to produce the necessary implement. 'Yes; it happens to fit fairly well,' and with a single turn of the wrist he had rearranged the screw, which it usually cost Evangela an immensity of labour and time to get satisfactorily fixed.

'Now, I think, you will not find that it will come off again, even if you do get knocked down by an ogre,' said Adlofstein, possessing himself again of her foot, and clasping the skate firmly on to it. 'How do you come to be pottering about in this dark hole all by yourself? Have you no one to take you round?'

Evangela's cheeks, already flushed with agitation, burnt yet more hotly at the disquieting allusion to her uncomplimentary remark about him; but she judged it best to take no notice of it, and she replied, with as much dignity as she could muster:

'I am only just learning to skate. I have been up and down with my friends; but I prefer to practise by myself until I can get along better.'

'But you will learn much quicker if you have someone to guide you and pull you along.

When you have once felt the knack of it, you have learnt the secret, and you can feel it much more quickly through someone else.'

'I don't suppose there is a royal road to learning anything,' Evangela said obstinately; 'and even if there were, I would rather not try it, if it involved dependence on other people. My friends are willing enough to skate with me; but it can't be much pleasure to them until I am more experienced, and I do not choose to be a drawback to them.'

'I see,' said Adlofstein, smiling grimly, 'that the Fräulein has also her share of original sin, and that it takes the form of an outrageous pride. Now, are you too proud to accept my guidance, and go round with me to test the firmness of that skate which I have fastened on for you?'

The suddenness of this proposal so entirely took Evangela's breath away that she could not find a word to say, and she gazed at him with startled eyes. Her first instinct was to reply with a hasty refusal; but as she hesitated, Adlofstein's brow darkened visibly, and an ominous light flashed into his eyes. She saw the proud and haughty resentment of his expression, and, with the recollection of the feud and all the misery it involved, there flashed

into her mind a thought which brought her to an instantaneous decision. If this accident offered a chance of reconciliation, it was better to run the risk of Baron Bertemilian's displeasure, than to let slip an opportunity which would probably never occur again.

'You know who I am?' she asked, looking him straight in the face.

She asked the question in German, which was the language they had been speaking throughout; but he answered her now in English, and in perfect English.

'Yes,' he said, with quiet deliberation. 'You are Miss Wynne, the English friend of the Bertemilians. You know my name, I think?'

The sound of the close-clipped English words, with the even accent that somehow seemed strangely refined and pleasant to the ear after the very different modulations of German voices, had a strange effect upon Evangela. Her heart leaped up, betraying to itself a sense of home-sickness which had been asleep for months, and she felt the sudden sympathy which draws one fellow-countryman to another She rose from the bench, and signified her assent by crossing her hands, and silently holding them out for him to take; and in a moment he had swept her into the crowd. Her

hands trembled a little in his grasp, and, supposing that she was afraid of falling, Adlofstein took her slowly and gently at first; but as he found that she kept up without difficulty, he put on more speed.

'You see, you can manage it quite well,' he said, still in English, as he guided her in long half-circles in and out of the swiftly-moving figures all over the lake. 'You can hang well enough on the edge of your skate when you are pulled over on to it; and when you have got used to the feel of it, you will be able to do it by yourself.'

'You are so strong,' said Evangela, almost too breathless to speak, 'I go in spite of myself. But, oh, please stop now! I must rest for a moment.'

He checked their course in an instant, and piloted her into the shelter of the bank out of the way of the whirling crowd. They stood there for a few minutes in silence, watching the movements of the skaters in the glare of the coloured lights, and Evangela looked about rather nervously for Baron Bertemilian, but she did not see him or either of the girls.

'You speak English like an Englishman,' she said, with an inquiring glance at her tall companion.

'Yes; I have spent a good deal of time in England,' he answered. 'And I am, besides, half English by birth. I sometimes feel as if I were more than half English here—all foreign, indeed—though when I was in England I felt German enough.'

'Ah, I know that feeling!' said Evangela quickly. 'I have had it myself, for I am half Austrian; and in England it used often to make me feel rather outside of English feelings and prejudices. And yet here I feel so entirely English.'

'Indeed!' he said. 'You are really partly Austrian? I did not know that. I thought you were entirely English; and I wondered—but I beg your pardon; it's no concern of mine, of course,' he said, breaking off abruptly. 'Shall we go on skating?'

The *Eis-fest* was at its height. The magnesian lights that were being burnt paled the bonfires on the banks, and threw long shafts of vivid colour across the ice; the swiftly-gliding figures showed out black against the brilliance. There was a hum of confused talk and laughter mingling with the ring of the skates and the whirring of the ice; and through it all, echoing deliciously in the evening air, rose sweet and clear and stirring the notes of the violins, led

by the soldierly *Kapell-meister*. The skaters kept time to the waltz-music, one glide to each bar; and they swayed in wide curves, passing out of the deep glow of a crimson light into the most vivid green, and then into a radiance of an intense blue that tinged the trees, the snowy banks, and the moving figures with an ethereal effect transcending the moonlight. The sense of swift movement without fatigue the music with its ever varying expression and swing, the changing lights and colours, and the intensely fresh and bracing air, combined to give a charm to the place that could have been found in no ballroom, and Evangela had never before experienced enjoyment in so keen a form. Her eyes were shining and her face glowing with pleasure, and she felt as if she would like to go on silently for ever. Adlofstein kept time to the music exactly, and he held her hands in a strong and steady grasp that inspired confidence, guiding her as if by magic through the thickest groups of the crowd; but he scarcely spoke a word.

'You must say when you are tired,' he said at last; but she answered breathlessly, 'Not yet—not yet!' and they went on until the final strains of the waltz.

Then Adlofstein slackened speed, and steered

for the seat from which they had started. Evangela sank down upon it, and gave that little involuntary sigh that is the fullest tribute that can be paid to a moment of enjoyment just past. She had forgotten all about Baron Bertemilian, and the possible consequences of this escapade had so completely gone out of her mind that she started when Adlofstein mentioned his name.

'You are a relation of the Bertemilians, then?' he said, reverting rather abruptly to the subject of their last connected conversation.

'Yes. My mother was a cousin of the late Baroness.'

'I see. I had not understood that,' he said stiffly. 'I supposed that you were wholly an Englishwoman.'

'I think that I am really wholly English,' said Evangela. 'I was brought up so, and one is what one is brought up and trained to be—don't you think so?'

'No!' he said, with startling emphasis. 'I do not think so. I think, on the contrary, that we are what we are born to be, and that we can no more escape the fate mapped out for us by our inherited tendencies, than we can alter the colour of our eyes or the shape of our heads. Men may be roughly divided into two

classes—the sheep and the goats. They are born so, and they cannot change their natures. It is rather hard on the goats, who are saddled with the burden of sin, and had no choice in their destiny ; but so it is, and so it will be to the end of time, no doubt.'

Adlofstein was standing up by the side of the bench, a towering, giant figure, and he was looking away across the ice. He spoke quietly, but with intense bitterness, and Evangela, looking up at him with startled eyes, saw that the subject was one on which he could not speak indifferently. She felt a strong and strangely stirring thrill of interest, and all the impressions and convictions received and nourished in silence through her young, innocent life were roused into a new strength. In ordinary circumstances they would never have found voice, and she would have been far too shy to say a word about them to an absolute stranger. But the circumstances were not ordinary, and Evangela was not in any ordinary mood. Her eyes kindled, and there was a ringing clearness in her voice as she said fearlessly :

'I don't in the least agree with you! There is that point of view, of course ; but it does not seem to me to be the right one. Personally,

I think that the goat is a very much more picturesque animal than the sheep, and I am sure that his capacity for the interests and enjoyments of life must be much greater. I don't see why he should want to change. Of course, some of us are born with more intractable natures than others, and with inherited tendencies which are hard to overcome; but the struggle necessary for that should be an invaluable means of deepening and strengthening character. I will never believe that we are nothing but the slaves of circumstance and the playthings of fate. That is a miserable creed!'

'It is a miserable creed, certainly,' Adlofstein assented calmly; 'but its being miserable does not prove that it is not true. There are, unfortunately, many things in existence in this world which are intensely miserable and sad, and yet they are none the less facts for that.'

'I do not believe that there are many miseries which are not capable of bringing us some good or blessing, if we only knew it. Happiness and misery are like the lights and shadows in an artist's picture, and no life can be perfect without both; but it is often in the most splendid pictures that one sees the deepest shadows, and it seems to me that the noblest

characters are those which have had the most to contend with.'

'You may contend; but when the struggle is against circumstance and inherited tendency, the result is a foregone conclusion. Heredity, environment, and blind chance—those are the three determining factors of a man's fate.'

'I don't believe it! At any rate, I would not believe it until I had tried and was beaten; and I would not be too ready to know when I was beaten,' said Evangela with sudden fire. 'I believe that resolution can bear down circumstance, and that character is stronger than fate. It is a fight in which suffering has to be faced; but it has been done over and over again, and with the most splendid results. I know that there are some people to whom it seems natural to be good; their lives are all sunshine, and they go right as if by instinct from their cradles. But is that all gain? Yellow ochre is all very well, but it is not worth as much as the gold that has been refined through the fire. You surely cannot think that the advantage is all on their side?'

'Not all, perhaps. Yet there are very few people who would think as you do.'

Adlofstein had listened to her with surprise and bewilderment, and when she stopped speak-

ing, he turned and gazed at her, as if in consideration of some problem that was difficult of solution.

'It seems to me that with the stronger faults the stronger virtues are to be found, and the most splendid possibilities are not to be attained except through suffering and self-conquest. I think——'

She broke off short, suddenly becoming aware of the intensity of the keen gaze fixed upon her, and, realizing the frankness with which she had been expressing herself, she blushed hotly.

'Yes? What were you going to say?' asked Adlofstein.

'I—I—I don't know!' Evangela stammered. 'I don't know why I should have said so much——'

'Go on—go on, pray,' said Adlofstein, with imperious impatience. 'For Heaven's sake don't stop me with the dead wall of conventional considerations. I want to hear your view, and it does not matter in the least what you say to me. We shall probably never meet again, except in the street.'

This was true, Evangela felt; and yet the assurance somehow lent her no additional confidence. She could not get over the shyness that

had suddenly come over her, and she answered almost timidly :

'I am afraid that I may be speaking about what I do not understand. It all seems so simple and clear to me ; and perhaps it is that I am ignorant and short-sighted, and therefore can only see shallows where depths exist. The philanthropy and Socialism of which one hears so much in London now, and the teaching of many of the new books about the irony of fate and the irresponsibility of the individual, appear to me simply foolish and ruinous. But these ideas have taken strong hold of the public mind, and the cleverest men seem to lend themselves to them. You see the effect in the legislation which is moving in every direction to take away individual responsibility and private judgment, and I think sometimes that I must be two hundred years behind the age. The ideas of the seventeenth century seem to me so much more rational and sound. I shall learn to see the error of my views, and get educated up to the new code in course of time, I suppose.'

'I hope you won't!' Adlofstein said, with sudden and almost startling emphasis. 'Don't ever give up the old-fashioned notions that you hold now. They may be fallacious, but they

are noble and beautiful and womanly; and if they make you happy, what more can you want? They are, at least, better than the modern muddle.'

Evangela was silent, wondering more and more at the turn that this strange conversation had taken; and Adlofstein stood for a few minutes looking, as if in an abstraction of thought, into the misty moonlight on the mountains; then he turned, and said abruptly:

'Good-night, Miss Wynne. I like the frankness and simplicity with which you have spoken out your real thoughts to me. I may never see you again except in the distance; but, all the same, I am glad I have met you to-night, and I thank you for what you have said. Good-bye.'

He bowed—the slight English salute that was familiar to Evangela—and, raising his hat, shot away into the crimson mist. In a moment he had vanished in the crowd, and Evangela, left alone in the shadow of the trees, sat as if in a dream, gazing at the black figures flitting in and out of the coloured lights.

CHAPTER XI.

SCHLOSS GREIFENBURG.

EVANGELA had not been long by herself, when she saw Melanie's pretty little figure shape itself out of the enchanted mist, and bear swiftly down upon her.

'Vangela,' she said in rather scared tones, 'where have you been all this time? We had quite lost you.'

From her face and manner, Evangela was instantly aware that Melanie knew who had been her companion, and as she rose to join her, she said:

'You know that I have been skating with Baron Adlofstein?'

'Yes, my dear; and papa knows it also! My dear, what made you? I fear we shall have a terrible scene when we get home.'

'Is Baron Bertemilian angry?' asked Evangela.

'I am afraid he is indeed. He would be with one of us. I don't know what he will say to you. How could it have happened, Vangela? You know that on the ice *Damenwahl* is the rule to protect us from inconvenient importunities. It is the lady who invites the partner —not the other way; and how could Adlofstein, who has never been introduced to you——'

'There is a sufficient explanation,' said Evangela; and she told her something of what had occurred.

Melanie was easily satisfied; but Evangela did not feel sure that the Baron would not take a different view, and she longed for the fête to come to an end that she might know the worst.

Twelve o'clock came at last, and people began to depart. Adlofstein was staying the night at the Greifenburg with his cousin, and he had left the ice almost immediately after he had parted with Evangela; but St. Evrémonde stayed on till the last. He walked most of the way home with the Bertemilians, keeping up an incessant flow of talk and laughter with the two girls, and in his presence Baron Bertemilian made no reference to Evangela's misdemeanour. Even when the Marquis had parted from them, and they walked on past the

shuttered shops of the town by themselves, he kept a constrained silence, and it was Evangela who at last introduced the subject.

'I did not have any skating with you to-night, Baron,' she said, turning to him with frank fearlessness as soon as they entered the house.

'No,' he said severely. 'You were otherwise occupied. You chose to take a partner with whom you could hardly expect me to enter into competition.'

The Baron's brow was clouded, and his eyes had an angry light in them; but he had been surprised into saying something different to what he intended, and this was what Evangela had wished. The two girls, who stood by listening in silence, were evidently aghast at the temerity of her demeanour.

'Yes,' she said quietly. 'I was skating with Baron Adlofstein; but I do not think you will consider that I did wrong when you know how it happened.'

'How could it happen?' demanded Baron Bertemilian stormily. 'Who introduced the fellow to you?'

'He introduced himself—he knocked me down.'

'Knocked you down!' ejaculated Melanie.

'Yes. Let me tell you how it came about;'

and she gave a full account of all that had taken place. 'My first impulse was to decline,' she said; 'but then I considered that if I did it might aggravate the mischief which has already been done, and I decided that it would be wiser to be civil. Was it a mistake? I am very sorry if it was.'

'H-m-m! I don't know——' said the Baron, a little shaken.

'I really and truly only wished to act for the best, and if I have done wrong, I will do what I can to repair it. If Baron Adlofstein ever speaks to me again, I can tell him that you do not wish me to have anything to do with him.

'No, no!' said the Baron hastily. 'I should not wish you to do that exactly: it was an awkward position, certainly, and I don't quite see how you could extricate yourself; but still—still——'

'I hoped that good might come out of it,' said Evangela, and she saw that the same idea had also occurred to him.

His wrath had evaporated and his brow had cleared, and before they parted for the night he was completely restored to good-humour.

'So, so, Fräulein Vangela, I see now why you were so anxious to attend the *Eisfest!*' he remarked jestingly. 'A fine advantage it was

to make of my complaisance, to go and receive the attentions of my mortal enemy!'

'Vangela, you are a witch!' Melanie said afterwards. 'How you do manage papa! Either of us would have been in disgrace for a month, however excellent our intentions might have been; but with you he is better pleased than ever—I know it by that joke he made—in his heart he is delighted. And oh, my dear! I hope you may be right, and that good may indeed come out of it. It does seem as if the cloud were lifting. Did you observe how St. Evrémonde skated nearly all the time with either Thekla or me, and did not care at all that his cousin was there? I wonder what he thought of Adlofstein's wonderful politeness to you? He must have observed it.'

St. Evrémonde had indeed observed his cousin's unusual action. He was a man whose notice nothing ever escaped, and as he walked back to the Greifenburg after parting with the Bertemilians, he was asking himself what it meant. That Adlofstein should evince an inclination for feminine society was a new, and at this particular moment a peculiarly inappropriate, thing; but remembering the stern decision with which his cousin had said that he would never marry, he felt that there was no

cause for uneasiness. Adlofstein was a man who never went back from his word, and St. Evrémonde knew that he might count upon the inheritance of Adlofstein and Greifenburg as an absolute certainty.

He stood in the waning moonlight, lost in thought, as he looked at the massive pile of the old fortress cutting high into the night sky, and he observed with a new interest, and a strange swelling exultation of heart, the grim outlines of the towers and turrets, and the cannon-balls lodged in the masonry; but suddenly he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and he gave a violent start as he realized that Adlofstein was standing on the bridge by his side.

'I thought you had gone in,' he said hastily, all the blood receding from his face at the thought that his friend might have guessed what was going on in his mind. It was an inconvenient trick that Adlofstein had, and he sometimes came out with surmises which were brutally near the truth; but to-night, if any awkward perceptions were in his mind, he had the grace to keep them to himself.

'I stayed out for a smoke,' Adlofstein said laconically, and he replaced between his lips the lighted cigarette that he held between his fingers.

'Let us go in,' said St. Evrémonde hurriedly; 'it is getting very late, and I am dead tired.'

'Yet you could stop to admire the effect of an old building in the moonlight!' observed Adlofstein as they passed into the shadow of the deeply-arched entrance; 'but you have an artistic soul.'

To this St. Evrémonde made no reply, and he hastened to change the current of his companion's ideas by introducing another subject.

'I think I know someone else who has an artistic soul,' he said with a light laugh. 'How about the pretty girls that you spoke so contemptuously of the other day, Adlofstein? You were attentive enough to one of them to-night. I did not imagine that it was in you to play the *preux chevalier* to such perfection!'

They had mounted the short, wide flight of shallow stone stairs which led to the dwelling-rooms of the house, and were entering the comfortably-furnished room which St. Evrémonde chiefly used. It had been the private sitting-room of the late Baron, and Adlofstein's brow contracted with a momentary expression of annoyance as he saw St. Evrémonde throw himself into the familiar chair by the writing-table. He himself walked to the window, which looked out upon the church and the priest's

house beyond, and he took no notice of his cousin's jesting remark.

'Seriously, though,' persisted St. Evrémonde, 'do you think the little English girl's discrimination so much in fault as you did? It appeared to me that she was very decidedly enjoying your company! By the way, how did you manage to get introduced?'

'I introduced myself,' replied Adlofstein briefly.

St. Evrémonde laughed—a little chuckle of intense amusement.

'Well,' he said, 'I can only say that I should not have thought it of you! Talk of wolves in the fold! I should like to know what Bertemilian thinks of you. If you had seen his face when he became aware that you had got one of his flock in your clutches!'

'Bertemilian—he saw, did he?'

'Of course he saw—everyone saw! You are not such an insignificant figure, my dear fellow, that you can escape notice. It is to be hoped that the young lady did enjoy her pleasure, for she will certainly have to pay for it.'

'In what way?—what do you mean?' asked Adlofstein, turning sharp round.

'I mean that she will get a tremendous rowing from Bertemilian. I could see that his

nerves were all on edge when I walked with them, and I expect it was only my presence that saved her then. I am sure there was a bad half-hour before her, and I think she will be lucky if she gets off with a scolding. He might pack her off home for her escapade.'

'Escapade! Good heavens, St. Evrémonde! what are you talking about? There was no escapade. She could not help it if I asked her to skate with me. She could not have declined without an exhibition of incivility that there was no call for.'

'You asked her, did you? Well, you know *Damenwahl* is supposed to be in force with strangers, and it might have been assumed that she had asked you.'

'Absurd! Besides, she would explain how it occurred. It was very simple and natural, really, and I cannot believe that even Bertemilian would be such a fool as not to see. You don't think that he would turn her out, or do anything brutal? If he *does*——'

'You would come out as her champion, perhaps?' suggested St. Evrémonde, choking with laughter; but he checked himself suddenly, as he met the flash of his friend's glance. 'Pooh, no! Bertemilian will do nothing desperate—he is not that sort of man. Don't disturb your-

self. He may storm and rage, and scold and lecture, but it will all end in words, and words don't lead to breaking of bones in the case of women ; on the contrary, the more you slang them, the more peace you are likely to have.'

'I don't hold the same views that you do about women, as you very well know,' said Adlofstein with a touch of disdain.

'So much the worse for you, my friend ; you don't know what you lose!' said St. Evrémonde lightly. 'I know that it is in vain to dispute with such a veritable Hippolytus, but after to-night I confess I have hopes of you. At any rate, you do not object to my cultivating the acquaintance of the Bertemilians?'

'Not in the least. Which of them do you intend to make miserable?'

'Happy, you mean! Well, I really don't know. Both are so charming in different ways, and perhaps that is as well, since it is a safe-guard. I like sisters—one can go so much further, without compromising one's self, you see. If I were rich—but you see I am not, so what is the use of thinking about it?'

'You may be better off some day. And that reminds me, St. Evrémonde. I think I may as well give the will that I made the other day into your keeping. You are the person chiefly

interested, so you will be sure to see that it comes into effect. I have brought it with me. Here it is. You had better put it in some safe place.'

St. Evrémonde took the packet which Adlofstein handed to him with a sudden flush rising to his cheeks, and an irrepressible gleam of eagerness in his eyes.

'It is exceedingly good of you, Louis, and I really don't know how to thank you,' he said rather nervously. 'Of course the chances are that it will never come into effect. You are almost the same age as I am, and are just as likely to live—I am sure I sincerely hope you will—but still that does not alter your kindness in thinking of me, when I had not the slightest claim——'

'Oh, as to that,' said Adlofstein dryly, 'I have no intention of putting you into possession of my property a moment before I need, and, as you justly remark, I may live as long as you do, so you don't owe me any very particular thanks. If one could take one's goods with one beyond the grave, one would, I dare say.'

'It seems a great shame that one cannot,' laughed St. Evrémonde. 'What! you are not going without any supper? Won't you take at least a cup of coffee?'

'No, thank you. I never touch coffee now;

I seem to have taken a dislike to it since that last attack of illness that came on after taking it. I will have some soup sent up to my room, please,' he said to a servant who was bringing in a tray set out with game, sweets, wine and hot coffee. 'You must excuse me to-night, Victor; I am still something of an invalid as regards diet and late hours, and Hempel would be solemnly horrified if he knew what I have done to-night. Good-night.'

St. Evrémonde wrung his hand warmly. He saw that his cousin's face was haggard and deathly pale, and the icy coldness of his hand was absolutely startling.

'Is he going to have another attack to-night, I wonder?' he thought, as he gazed after the giant figure leaving the room. 'Good heavens! if he should, and it were to prove fatal!' He sat down to his solitary supper, and taking the will out of the unsealed envelope in which it was contained, opened it, and slowly read over the provisions that he had been too much confused to take in thoroughly when Adlofstein had told him of them. It was rich sauce to the meal, and yet when St. Evrémonde rose from the table, and folded up the paper, having thoroughly mastered its contents, there was a cloud upon his brow.

'Sixty thousand florins to the Baroness—it is a great sum!' he said regretfully. 'I should have thought that thirty would have been enough. And, then, thirty thousand to Stephanie Stillenheim. It will make a terrible hole in the estate, and the Stillenheim has no sort of claim. I wonder if he ever thought of marrying her? Can he possibly have cared anything about such an ugly, wizened, cross-grained creature? No! it is not likely. It is because he is sorry for her. He knows that she is a hopeless old maid, and that there is no provision for her; and it is just like his quixotism to take it upon himself. Then the legacies to the servants, and five thousand to the priest—bah! I should have thought that Adlofstein would have had more sense than to fritter away the property in these foolish legacies. The estate won't bear it, and this precious document won't be worth so very much to me, after all.'

In spite of this conclusion, however, St. Evrémonde folded up the will with considerable care, and began to consider where he should place it for present safety. As he glanced round the room, his eye was caught by a small inlaid cabinet near the writing-table, that had keys in some of the drawers; and going up to it, he

opened one of the drawers, and looked through its contents. There was nothing in it but rubbish—bits of sealing-wax and paper, and one or two old business letters addressed to Baron Adlofstein. It had evidently been used by the late Baron as a receptacle for odds and ends, and St. Evrémonde felt no compunction in looking through all the drawers. The locks were loose and ramshackly, and the keys of the poorest and simplest description ; but in the top drawer, lying by the side of a large bunch of curious old seals in gold and silver, was a key of a different description—a key that evidently belonged to a lock of some superior kind.

'Now, what does this key belong to?' said St. Evrémonde, looking observantly round the room. 'Ah! I wonder if it opens that drawer in the writing-table that I found was locked?'

He tried it, and after a little difficulty, owing to the rustiness of the key, it went round in the lock, and the drawer came open. There were a quantity of papers in it, and on the top of them all was a small sealed packet, bearing an address in a large and legible handwriting. St. Evrémonde took it up, and read :

'For my son, Louis Wilderich, Freiherr von Adlofstein. To be opened in the case of my sudden or violent death only.'

CHAPTER XII.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

The Marquis stood silent and motionless, gazing fixedly at the inscription on the packet which he held in his hand. What did this mean? What could it mean but one thing? It was an explanation of the mystery which had surrounded the death of the late Baron—it must be that—but what explanation and what effect would it have upon Adlofstein? The unsealed packet, whose contents St. Evrémonde knew, lay on the writing-table where he had dropped it in his search for a safe resting-place, and he took it up and weighed it against the other packet—the sealed packet, whose contents he did not know. What was the possible relation of those two packets to each other? That was the point which St. Evrémonde was debating in his own mind. He had a code of honour which was in its way strict and punctilious enough, and in

ordinary circumstances he would not have hesitated for a moment as to the proper course to take. He would have scorned to open another man's letters or pry into his secrets, and he had never yet betrayed the faith and confidence of any male friend, however many of the opposite sex he had played fast and loose with. But now—now—might not Adlofstein's whole point of view be altered by the contents of this packet, and his consequent action be altogether different? Let him change his mind about the disposition of his property, and the will that it had seemed so important to secure would become merely so much waste-paper. It was a matter of close personal concern to St. Evrémonde, and his life had not been one that fitted him to meet the tremendous temptation which suddenly assailed him.

The wax candles in the silver sconces on the writing-table had burnt down nearly to their sockets, and one of them, which had guttered, flickered and died out. Through the windows there came a dull, pale light, that seemed like the herald of a sickly dawn, but it was really only the lingering radiance of the moon, which had sunk behind the mountains. St. Evrémonde had lost all count of time; but he was roused by the sound of the church clock striking two.

He looked up with a start, and moving hastily to the door, he locked and bolted it.

'I must see it first,' he said with the deliberation of a man who has come to a carefully considered determination; and taking up the packet, he inspected the seals closely. There were three of them, and the impression was that of the Adlofstein crest—a drawn sword and an eagle on a rock. When he put down the packet again, he went to the drawer in which he had found the key, and, taking out the bunch of seals he had seen there, he compared the impressions.

'I thought so,' he said, as one of the seals fitted exactly, 'and here is the same sealing-wax if it should be necessary to seal it up again;' and without further hesitation he broke the seals and opened the packet.

He had scarcely done so, and he had not had time to read more than the first words, 'My dear boy,' with which the letter began, when the second candle flared up and went out, and he was left in darkness. In the dim moonlight the furniture of the room was not distinguishable, and St. Evrémonde muttered a curse as he stumbled over a chair in his gropings after a light. He found a candle at last, and lighting it with a match from the little gold box—a

lady's present—that he always carried in his pocket, he went back to the letter which had fallen into his hands, and read the message from the dead.

'My dear Boy,

'When these lines meet your eyes I shall be dead and gone, and my voice will never again sound in your ears. I know that, in spite of the unhappy quarrels and dissensions that have come between us, you have never really wavered from the strong affection which has always existed in our hearts, any more than I have, and I know that this letter, which will seem to you like a voice from the grave, will be in your eyes the most precious of all the papers that you will find. But, Louis—my dear, dear Louis—if I have died in a natural way, not with mysterious suddenness or violence, I ask you to go no further, but to thrust this letter unread into the fire. I know that I can trust you to do this, and I hope and pray that you will be able to do it. In case, however, that should happen which I hope will not, but which I dread, I think that you ought to be put on your guard against a danger which might afterward threaten yourself or others. That danger is the Baroness, my wife. It is with the deepest pain and reluctance

that I write it (but I know that you will respect my secret): my poor wife is subject to fits of insanity, during which she has shown homicidal tendencies. She has twice attempted to destroy my life: once by stabbing me, and once by introducing burning charcoal into my room when I was asleep. I believe that the relation of her disease to these acts is obscure, and rather than expose her to the miseries that might befall her if the thing became known, I have chosen to face the risk and keep it secret. Since it is only my own safety that is threatened, I consider that I have a right to adopt this course—privately taking every precaution that I can—but in case these precautions should fail, and I should perish without having time to give any explanation or warning, I feel it my duty to leave behind some testimony for your enlightenment. For in the last instance, when I was nearly suffocated by the charcoal, it occurred to me that in the absence of all evidence against my wife, suspicion might fall upon an innocent person, or I might be thought to have taken my own life in a fit of insanity. This last supposition I especially wish to guard against, as I know it would bring a cloud over your whole life. From words that you have let fall in my hearing I know the horror you have of the taint

of insanity which has in far-back times been a curse in our family ; and if you thought that it had been revived in me, I fear that, with your strong will and unyielding conscience, the wreck of your happiness might be the result. I thank God daily, Louis, that I have no children from this marriage, and that, with the splendid physique and the pure and healthy blood that you inherit from your English mother, you are safe from the curse, and will be able to regenerate our House.

'It was not until after my marriage, when circumstances occurred that caused me to make inquiries, that I found out that the family of my second wife had this taint—was, indeed, saturated with insanity. Perhaps if I had discovered it before, I should not have married her—but I don't know! I have not your inexorable strength of will and determination, and I was infatuated. I made a mistake. I know it now, and I fear I have ruined her life as well as my own. She never loved me as I loved her—I knew that from the beginning ; but I hoped that the strength of my affection for her might win her. It has not done so, and I fear that the strain of an uncongenial marriage tie may have had its effect in throwing her mind off its balance. It has been an awful

mistake; but as the responsibility of it is mine, I feel that the burden ought also to be borne by me. For two years my life has been darkened by this trouble; you have become estranged from me, and in order to protect my wife against herself, I have been obliged to shut out all society from my house. You will understand now what the cloud has been, and you will forgive my shortcomings towards you. I know your warm and generous heart, and I think you will already have done so without this explanation. But oh, Louis! if the worst should happen, and you should read this, be warned by my fate! Do not marry a woman who has not given her whole heart to you, and choose your wife rather for the qualities of her mind and heart than for mere beauty or outward charm. The latter will fade, and you become so accustomed to the features of a face that is always near you, that it is beauty of expression alone that matters in the end. Your mother was not beautiful; but I was perfectly happy with her, and it is the remembrance of that time which alone sustains me now. I trust that you may find the like happiness with a woman who is worthy of you.

'And now, my dear son, I think I have said all that is necessary, except to beg you not to

be hard upon my poor wife. I hope that she is not really mad, and that it is only a passing weakness that has had this terrible effect upon her nerves; but, however that may be, I know that for my sake you will be pitiful to her; and if restraint should become necessary, you will take care that it is of a mild kind. For I love her still, Louis, in spite of all that has happened. You, with your true and constant nature, can understand how that should be, and I can trust you to do all that I should wish. My last prayer to you is that you should forgive her and me, and that you should suffer no rankling remembrances of the past to cloud your life and poison your happiness.

'Adieu, my dear, dear son, and believe that I am now, as I have always been,

'Your deeply devoted and loving father,

'WILDERICH FRANZ LOTHAR VON ADLOFSTEIN.'

By the light of the single candle which flared on the writing-table, St. Evrémonde read the letter through to the end; and when he had got to the bottom of the last page, he turned to the first, and deliberately read it through again. He was not a man to do anything by halves, and though he could not stifle a twinge of compunction as he read the pathetic opening

out of the father's heart that was intended for the eyes of his son alone, he would not allow his scruples to influence his action in a matter that so deeply affected his interests. After he had thoroughly mastered the contents of the letter, he let it fall upon the table, and set himself to consider the matter carefully in all its bearings. It did not take him long to arrive at a conclusion, and before he had got to the end of the second reading of the letter, the whole case lay before him as clearly as if it were set forth in the columns of a newspaper report.

'She killed him!' he said—'that she-devil! My God! and he suffered her to do it—what a man! She is a homicidal maniac, and she has tried to kill Louis, too! Those illnesses of his —of course they have been the effect of poison administered by her. After taking a cup of coffee, he said—God in heaven! she nearly did it that time, and if she tries again she will succeed. She will try again unless I——'

He broke off suddenly, his mind recoiling from an aspect of the situation that presented itself all at once, and a strange convulsion passed over his features.

'These attacks have been the result of no inherent defect in his constitution—he is as

strong and as sane as anyone ; and the curse that he imagines throws its shadow over him, stands far away from him. It is nearly a hundred years since the taint broke out before, and I am descended from that blood as much as he. His father was as free from it as I, and the melancholy that came over him in the last years of his life was simply the result of domestic unhappiness. When Adlofstein learns all this, what influence will it have upon him—what effect will it have upon his actions, upon his disposition of his property? Why, of course, his whole point of view will be altered ; he will marry ; he will have a family, and this will that he has made in my favour——'

St Evrémonde broke into a bitter little laugh.

'It was certainly a peculiarly ironical turn of fate that should make me the discoverer of this packet, and on this night of all others! If only I had not had this cursed idea of hunting for a safe place in this room—if I had not lost the key of my despatch-box—if the lock of my portmanteau had not been broken—if that confounded valet of mine were not such a prying scoundrel—if it were not for the combination of all these little chances, that key

might have reposed where it was for another ten years, and the packet would have lain undisturbed until mine had become the rightful hand to open it. Adlofstein would long have been dead, I should have been his heir, and I would have cleared his father's memory with no stains on my conscience. Now——'

There was another long pause, in which his thoughts became too concentrated to be formulated.

'If only I had not found it!' he muttered. 'If I could forget that I had found it! But that, unfortunately, is impossible.'

The clock outside struck three, and he started violently at the sound. 'Good heavens! how late it is! I must decide upon something. I have got to go off early to-morrow. Well, it will do no harm to leave it where it is for the present. I will close it up, and then I can make up my mind afterwards whether I will give it him or not.'

He began cracking off the seals with his knife, intending to replace them with fresh ones; but the task was more difficult than he had foreseen; his hand was not very steady, and he found that he was cutting the paper. He thought that it might be more easily done by holding the seals above the flame of the

candle until the wax should be sufficiently heated to take a fresh impression ; and he tried that plan, but it succeeded even worse than the other. At the end of half an hour he had completed his operations, but he was thoroughly dissatisfied with the result—and, indeed, the paper, cut, smoked, and even burned in one place, showed signs of having been tampered with that would have been patent to the least critical observer. St. Evrémonde was angry with himself for such clumsiness.

'I can't give it him as it is now—that is very certain,' he reflected. 'Well, what if I were to leave it where I found it, and let it take its chance of being discovered? Then, when it is found—if ever it is—even though he should see that it had been tampered with, he would never dream of connecting it with me. I might even give it to him now, saying that I had found it as it is. I don't see why he should suspect me—and yet—no, no! I cannot do that! He would know that I had a motive ; he would make awkward remarks ; and I might betray myself by a look, if not by a word. He is very keen, and he has a most detestable habit of reading one's thoughts. I cannot do it—and, besides, it is too much to expect that I should with my own hands pull down the corner-

stone of my fortunes. I will warn him against the Baroness. That is as much as can be expected of me, and I will lock this paper up again to take its chance.'

He put the packet back underneath all the other papers, and closed the drawer. He had had some difficulty in unlocking it, but now the key turned easily enough, and for safety he put it into his pocket with the will, which he resolved to take upstairs. Somehow the idea of leaving those two papers together, even though they were safe from discovery, was repugnant to him, and the safeguarding of the will from the inquisitive eyes of his valet seemed a comparatively unimportant matter now.

He drank off a small wineglassful of absinthe before he left the room, and then, taking up the candle, which had dwindled down into a very small piece, he passed out into the wide corridor that all the rooms opened into. The tall windows of the corridor looked out on to the square court in the centre of the Castle; but there was no light from outside now. It was pitch dark in the gallery, and the faint light that St. Evrémonde carried flickered and waned in the draughts, bringing out ghostly shadows in all directions. He walked very cautiously and quietly; but in the dead silence

of the night the boards creaked horribly, and he felt a nervousness and a sense of guilt and fear which were strange to him as he made his way round the hollow square to the opposite wing, and approached the room which he knew was occupied by Adlofstein. He had to pass it to reach his own, and he stopped to listen for a few seconds at the door. There was no sound from within, and St. Evrémonde passed on.

'He is all right to-night, at all events,' he thought. 'I am sure I am glad of that;' but in his inmost heart he knew that the reflection was rather the expression of what he ought to feel than of what he actually did.

He closed his door softly behind him, and ten minutes later the light shining from under it went out. The church-clock was striking four as it disappeared, and it was echoed by the town-hall clock and all the other clocks in the town. The chimes died away, and then the most perfect stillness reigned in the Castle, and the great corridor looked out with blank, unseeing eyes into the court below.

Suddenly out of the silence there came a sound. What was it? A creak of the old oak boards—a soft footstep—yes, and a dark figure stealing furtively past St. Evrémonde's door. It was St. Evrémonde's man, Alphonse

Laroche, and having satisfied himself that his master's light was extinguished, he made his way noiselessly to the room that the Marquis had just quitted. When he reached it, he pushed aside the slide of a dark lantern that he carried, and as he flashed the light on to the writing-table, he had much the appearance of a burglar in the act of his nefarious business. It was not felony, however, that he meditated, but merely the satisfaction of an intensely prying and scheming nature, which knew the full value of the advantages that might be gained from a knowledge of other men's affairs, and particularly from those of his master.

'What was he doing all that time?' he questioned. 'He was sitting here; that I know by the sound he made when he got up to fetch a fresh candle. It must have been something interesting to keep him up till this time of night. He was not writing, for the ink has not been touched, and the pens are dry. He was not reading—at least not a book. Aha! what have we here?'

The Frenchman had a sharply-cut, black-avised face with intensely keen black eyes, and they brightened suddenly as their glance fell upon the floor. There was a little fall of dust upon the polished parquet, and Laroche saw in

a moment that it had been caused by the opening of the locked drawer that had been a trouble to him before this. He pulled softly at the handles; perhaps the Marquis had left it unlocked; but no, it was fast, it would not come open.

'Bah!' he said, with a look of supreme disgust. 'He has locked it again, and put the key in his pocket. That is the one place that I cannot get into, and he will go off with it to-morrow. What is the good of having lost the key of his despatch-box and broken the lock of his portmanteau, if I am to be circumvented in this sort of way? *Mille tonnerres!*'

The last ejaculation was one of surprise. In his impatience and disgust he had given a sharp pull to the handles of the drawer, and with a little click it had come open. The lock was a peculiar one, and the ease with which the Marquis had fastened it had been delusive; it had not properly caught the bolt. A grin of satisfaction and delight spread over Laroche's face as he realized this, and, plunging his hands in amongst the papers, he lifted out the whole heap. He turned the bundle upside down upon the table, in order that he might replace them in the order in which he found them, and thus the sealed packet that the Marquis had so

carefully hidden under the others was the first that met Laroche's eye.

He took it up in his hand and inspected it narrowly. He noted the torn edge of the paper and the burned spot, and he applied his sharp nose to the sealing-wax. Then, carefully examining the leathern surface of the table by the light of his lantern, he placed his finger upon a little pinky-red spot that was near the centre. It was the merest dot, but it was red, and it was sealing-wax. It was, moreover, an unusual shade of colour, and it was the same as that on the packet.

'Br-r-r-r! I think that will do!' the man said to himself; 'but it may be as well to glance through the whole lot, to make sure.'

He looked through the remaining papers; but a very cursory examination satisfied him that they were of no interest, and he replaced them in their order in the drawer. The prize which he had discovered he did not put back. An instant's reflection convinced him that, if the Marquis discovered the loss of it, he would never dare to set on foot open inquiries for a packet so compromising; and he slipped it into his pocket with an exultant smile on his dark, diplomatic face.

'Aha, M. le Marquis! if ever a time of

reckoning should come between you and me, this may prove a trump card in my hand! I will keep it for that.' And making his way down to his little bedroom on the ground-floor, he slept the sleep of the just until it was time to take up his master's chocolate and hot water in the morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAMENWAHL.

St. Evrémonde was away, and Adlofstein, who had gone back to his Castle in the mountains, came no more to the ice. Evangela was glad. She had been looking forward with considerable apprehension to the awkwardness that might arise from meeting him ; and his absence was to her a source of unmitigated relief and thanksgiving. For a week after the *Eisfest* she did not see him ; but one afternoon, when the three girls, all warm and glowing from the exercise of skating, were returning home, they met the redoubtable Baron in the Platz. He was on his way from the Stillenheims' to the Greifenburg, and a brilliant colour flashed into Evangela's face as she saw him approaching. Ought she to give any sign of recognition ? would he bow ? she asked herself hurriedly. At any rate, the failure in civility, if failure

there was to be, should not be on her side—on that point she was resolved ; and she looked at him with a half-smile in her eyes. She fully expected him to go by without a glance ; but he did not. He saw the recognition in her face as he came up, and whatever his previous intention might have been, his instincts as a gentleman asserted themselves at the moment, and he bowed and raised his hat as he went past.

Melanie and Thekla were wildly excited by this wonderful exhibition of civility on Adlofstein's part, and they could talk of nothing but the *rencontre* until they reached home. Evangela was a little annoyed by some of Thekla's remarks, and she was glad when the post came in bringing letters which formed a distraction.

There was a letter for Evangela from Mrs. Dabley, and it contained a long and detailed account of a most extraordinary and objectionable development in the character of Miss Mills. This young lady, it seemed, had an unprincipled habit of agreeing with every opinion that was advanced, whatever her own views might be ; and as Mrs. Dabley and the Major very often held different opinions, they had speedily found her out, and were disgusted with

her duplicity. She had agreed with the Major that blue was the best possible colour for a drawing-room carpet, and had aided and abetted him in the choice of a regular Reckitt's Blue shade, and then, when the new carpet had come, and Mrs. Dabley was horrified at it, Miss Mills had sympathized with her, and had said that no one but a Yahoo could ever have chosen such a colour. Mrs. Dabley did not know whether she was an Anarchist in disguise, or what; but she felt very uneasy, for what possible *object* could a young woman have for such gratuitous deception? The only explanation that she (Mrs. Dabley) could think of was that a long course of training in duplicity had so warped her mind as to make her incapable of expressing herself with honesty and straightforwardness; but at whatever cost or risk to herself, Mrs. Dabley had made up her mind to keep on the girl, in the hope of REFORMING her (trebly underlined).

Evangela, sitting toasting her feet at the open door of the stove in her room, was smiling to herself over this account of Miss Mills' enormities, when she was startled by a scream from the outer room, and the next moment the two girls came bursting in.

'Oh, Vangela, Vangela! What *do* you

think? We are all invited to a *grande chasse* after Christmas! The Countess Rothenfels has written to invite us, and she hopes we will stay for a week. Is it not perfectly delightful?'

'Of course you must come too,' said Melanie, seeing a doubtful expression on Evangela's face; 'we would not go without you; and you are sure to enjoy it. We shall meet such nice people; and it will be such a new experience for you to see one of our great hunts.'

'I should not be surprised if M. de St. Evrémonde were to be there,' said Thekla. 'That French valet of his—Alphonse Laroche, I think his name is—told Marie Kutscher——'

She stopped short, catching herself up rather suddenly.

'Go on,' said Melanie eagerly. 'You have been talking again with that Kutscher girl, I see; but never mind, I will forgive you this time. What did she say?'

'Well, she said that she had heard from Laroche that the Marquis was going on a visit somewhere in Moravia, after Christmas, and it might very likely be to the Rothenfels. They are friends of his, I know. And oh, Melanie—it just occurs to me—isn't it possible that he may have suggested to the Countess to ask us?'

'It might be!' said Melanie, with a beaming

face; 'I should not be so very much surprised. I do hope he will be there. That would be delightful indeed. And now—oh, my dear girls, how busy we shall be till we go! There are all the Christmas preparations to attend to: we must have a Christ-child's tree for Vangela; oh yes, indeed we must. As for the English ones that she says she has seen, I know they must have been absurdities! Then we must prepare toilettes for Rothenfels. You must make up that lovely rose-coloured silk that you have brought with you, Vangela; you will look so charming in that dress, and I have set my heart on seeing you in it. Marie shall help you, and so will I. Oh, we will all of us work like bees!'

That was a strange Christmastide for Evangela, and it was fortunate for her that there should be so much novelty and interest in her surroundings to distract her mind from recollections and associations that were cruelly sad and bitter. As it was, she found it impossible to keep bright on Christmas Day. It was a bitterly cold day, with a freezing wind blowing from the north, and sweeping down the snowy streets, and Melanie and Thekla donned with great satisfaction the new furs that had been the Baron's present to them. They all three

went to high Mass in the morning, and all the time, even during the service, there went on in the heads of the two girls a gay little tune with a *Leit-motif* of pink silk dresses, new furs, embroidered handkerchiefs, and all the other presents that had made them happy. In their innocent vanity, they kept on their furs all through the long service; but it was at the cost of a good deal of personal inconvenience, for their faces soon became crimson with heat. The church had been crowded ever since an early hour in the morning, and it was now full to overflowing with peasants who had come in from all the villages round about. The women sat in the pews, but the men had to stand in the open space before the altar, and in the middle aisle; and the privilege of occupying the front seat, which the Bertemilians, as the chief people in the place, enjoyed, was a doubtful one. Melanie confided to Evangela that in summer it was impossible to exist without a vinaigrette to your nose the whole time, and Evangela found it bad enough in winter.

All the great candles round and upon the altar were lighted up; the three priests, in their most magnificent vestments, of crimson and gold and deep lace, went through their solemn ceremonies, and the air was thick with

the smoke of the incense which the little red-robed acolytes waved about the altar-steps. At the tinkle of the bell, the crowd of peasants flung themselves upon their knees in a passion of devotion, and, as the Host was uplifted, a breathless hush seemed to brood over the whole silent and motionless congregation. Then came the monotonous sing-song of the priest again, and the deep sustained notes of the organ streaming out in rich chords, and presently a beautiful chorale with a string-band accompaniment; and over all the great figure of the crucified Christ, hanging high on the uplifted cross behind the altar, leant forward, and seemed to look down with unutterable compassion on the crowd of prostrate worshippers below.

It was an intensely impressive service; but Evangela's mind had gone back to the little Welsh church, and the holly and the ivy and the carol-singing, and the dear, beautiful face of her white-haired father; and the altered surroundings could not banish the remembrance of her desolation, and the despairing sense of loneliness that swept over her. In vain she reminded herself how much she had to be thankful for—the very goodness of the Bertemilians to her did but make more blank the uncertainty that lay beyond the time she was

to spend with them. She thought of her aunt's letter, and the difference between her position and that of poor, invertebrate Miss Mills, who was being kept on to be reformed. And then she chanced to catch sight of Stephanie Stillenheim, whose pinched and haggard face, with its bitter and anxious expression, was on a line with her on the other side of the aisle. Evangela had seen very little of Stephanie, and she had only spoken to her on one or two occasions when she had met her out walking with Thekla; but she had heard enough about her to know how dreary and hopeless was her life, and how universally disliked and despised she was, and she felt sure that there was no one in the town who was more unhappy and more lonely than the Baroness Stephanie. Evangela was intensely sorry for her, and as she compared her own life with Stephanie's, she felt that it was wicked and ungrateful for her to give way to repining and depression.

The Gregorian chant of the *Ita Missa est* recalled Evangela's wandering thoughts, and, the long service over at last, she found herself outside in the bitter wind and snow again. Thekla lingered to speak to her friend, Clothilde Müller, who had been making grimaces at her all through the service, in order to direct her

attention to the ridiculous effect of a dilapidated old feather with which Stephanie had attempted to furbish up her last winter's hat.

'You understand I have two hats?' Clothilde was saying, with an absurd exaggeration of Stephanie's mincing accents, as she and Thekla passed out of church. 'But I make them into four. First I wear my winter hat with its winter trimming, as it was when it came out of the ark. Then on Christmas Day I come out fresh, with the trimming of my summer hat put on it. Then I arrange my summer hat with the trimming of my winter hat; then I take that off, and wear the hat as it was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.'

'Why not wear the hats without any trimming for a change, and so make up the variety to the half-dozen!' said Thekla, so convulsed with laughter that she did not perceive that Stephanie was coming out of the church-porch close behind her, and was hurrying past with a look of mortification on her poor thin face, which plainly indicated that she had overheard enough to know the subject of their amusement.

Clothilde Müller was accounted a wit in the town. She was the daughter of a rich manu-

facturer, who owned most of the linen factories in the place, and she was always expensively dressed in the height of the fashion. She was rather a plain young woman, but she cultivated the acquaintance of the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood, and she knew that she might trust the men who were attracted by their good looks to stay to talk to her. She had the gift of mimicry to an unusual degree, and the droll way in which she put things had won her a certain reputation. Thekla's feelings for her were divided between fear and admiration; but she was irresistibly tickled by this sally at Stephanie Stillenheim's expense, and Melanie could not restrain a smile. Evangela was indignant.

'It has never struck you, I suppose, Fräulein Müller,' she said with quiet disdain, 'that there are different sorts of poverty in the world—that there is a poverty of heart as well as a poverty of hats, and that the latter is not, perhaps, the most despicable? Did you intend Baroness Stephanie to overhear your charitable remarks? Because she certainly did.'

'Did she?' said Clothilde innocently. 'Dear me! I don't see why she should mind, if she did. We were only speaking of a feather in her cap, you know.'

Evangela did not like Fräulein Müller, and she was not at all pleased when she found that the girls were arranging to join her party to go to the fête upon the ice that evening. It was the only means by which they could be present at the fête, however, as the Baron had an engagement, and Melanie and Thekla would have been so dreadfully disappointed to have lost the fun that it was impossible to raise any objection.

They went to the Müllers' to *goûter*, and amused themselves all the afternoon with *Gesellschaft-spielen*, cards, and other elevating games. Evangela was not in her element at all, and she was heartily glad when it got dark, and it was time to start for the ice. She had been intensely annoyed by a paper—written, she suspected, by Clothilde—coupling her name with Baron Adlofstein's, and she fervently hoped that he would not put in an appearance upon the ice. The Müllers were among the first-comers, and he was not there when they arrived; but as the crowd increased, and Evangela's spirits, under the influence of the lights, the music, and the exhilarating exercise, began to rise, she suddenly caught sight of his tall figure towering above the crowd in the distance. She flew away from the quiet spot

where she was practising by herself, and sought refuge under Melanie's wing; but she could not remain with her the whole evening, and Melanie laughed at her timidity.

'Why should you mind if he does speak to you?' she said. 'Pooh! what does Clothilde's nonsense matter? Nobody minds her. If papa approves, it is all right. And he does approve, my dear—more than he would like to say, I fancy.'

In spite of this assurance, however, Evangela took care to keep well in the middle of the ice, where the skaters were thickest; and, as Adlofstein was cutting figures near the bank, she thought she was safely out of his way. But at the end of the evening she happened to raise her eyes, and saw him standing near her in the midst of the crowd. Their eyes met, and Adlofstein bowed.

'You must have gained a good deal of confidence on your skates since I was here last, to be able to move in this whirl without inconvenience,' he remarked, with a touch of sarcasm.

'I do feel a little steadier than I did,' Evangela answered.

But fate is perverse sometimes, and before she had well finished her sentence, a couple of girls, skating together, lurched up against her

and gave her an accidental push. She staggered, and, putting out her hands in an attempt to regain the equilibrium that she was in danger of losing, felt them suddenly gripped by Adlofstein.

'What is the point of your staying here to be jostled and hustled by the mob like this? Come this way,' he said imperiously, and, without waiting for her consent, he guided her to a quieter part of the lake.

Evangela was so astonished that she had not a word to say. But it was not long before her bewilderment gave way to irrepressible amusement; and when they stopped, and Adlofstein looked into her face, he saw the traces of a smile.

'You are not angry?' he said. 'That is right. I knew you were not one of the silly sort. Now, tell me why you were avoiding me to-night. Was it because of anything that Baron Bertemilian has said to you?'

'N-n-o,' answered Evangela hesitatingly.

'He did not make you a scene—what do you call it?—blow you up—because you skated with me the other night?'

'No.'

'You are sure?'

'Yes. I explained to him how it had hap-

pened, and then he was quite satisfied. He was most kind. Poor Baron Bertemilian! he always is so kind.'

'Humph! Some people have found his kindness rather too much of a good thing. However, we won't discuss him now. Well, if you are not afraid of his displeasure, is there anything to prevent you from inviting me to skate with you? I had forgotten the other night that it was *Damenwahl*.'

Evangela could not help smiling at this very broad hint. She felt that it was strange that the dread and shrinking with which she had thought of this possibility should have left her so suddenly and completely; but the pleasure of hearing the familiar home language seemed a sufficient explanation, and, bowing as low as she could upon her skates, she said, with an absurd imitation of the German manner:

'May I have the honour, Herr Baron?'

Her dark eyes were brimming over with fun, and a bright colour mantled her cheeks. She looked bewitchingly sweet and charming in her absolute unconsciousness, and had St. Evrémonde been in his cousin's place at that moment, he would not have failed to appreciate a vision so enchanting; but Adlofstein was evidently quite insensible to such impressions,

and he was totally destitute of the gallantry that distinguished St. Evrémonde. He smiled grimly at the parody of German manners; but he only said rather gruffly, 'Come along,' and, taking her hands into his grasp again, he swept her off.

The skimming motion over the ice was so delightful to Evangela that she felt perfectly happy, and she forgot to wonder how strange it was that in two minutes she should feel as much at her ease with the formidable Adlofstein as if she had known him for the best part of her life. His conversation was certainly interesting, and the subjects that came up chanced to fall in with her tastes. She spoke about the peasants who lived upon their own land, and observed what wretchedly hard lives they seemed to her to lead; and he explained the system to her, and denounced the stupidity and short-sightedness of the politicians who were trying to introduce the same unworkable plan into England. His views of English politics were those of an outsider who, having no special interests at stake, sees from a distance a clear and unbiased vision of things as they really are, and Evangela was reminded of her father as she listened to him. The gentle and genial old clergyman had been much less

gloomy and severe, and his condemnation of Radical and Socialistic ideas had been modified by a liberal admixture of the milk of human kindness ; but his opinions had been identically the same as those which Baron Adlofstein was now expressing, and Evangela had not, since his death, met anyone on the same intellectual level.

She listened with the deepest interest to all that Adlofstein had to say, and when the Baron, surprised to find a girl—even an English girl—so well up in such subjects, asked her how it was, she told him something of her father, and of the interests that she had had in common with him. She did not say much, but that she should enter on the subject at all was an extraordinary departure from her usual reticence. Even to Melanie she hardly ever mentioned her father ; but the tension to which her feelings had been strung all day seemed to demand relief, and in speaking to this comparative stranger of her old home and her old life she found it.

Adlofstein listened silently, comprehending more than she said, and he perceived how close had been the tie between the father and daughter, and how cruel had been the rending

of it. He was in no hurry to break off the conversation; but Evangela, looking towards the road from a point by the bank at which they had paused to talk, observed two horses that were being led up and down by a groom in dark livery—two such splendid horses as she had not yet seen in Lindenthal, and she made a remark about them.

'They are mine,' said Adlofstein, 'and I am afraid that I must leave at once. I have already stayed longer than I ought, for I promised the poor Baroness that she should not spend Christmas night alone, and my cousin St. Evrémonde is coming to supper with us. He has been away ever since the last *Eisfest;* but he comes back to-night, and, as his route is over the Gabel, he will pass by my house. I expect he will be there before me.'

They had skated all round the lake, and the music had stopped. At the entrance, where the trees overshadowed the ice, Adlofstein let go her hands, and paused, looking at her in silence for a moment.

'Good-bye,' he said briefly, and he was turning away with a bow, when Evangela held out her hand.

'We are compatriots, and should be friends,'

she said, with a frank smile. 'Don't you think so?'

He answered nothing; but though he took her offered hand, it was with a coldness and formality that surprised and repelled her, and a cloud came over his brow which she could not understand.

'I really do not know what I think of him,' she said when she rejoined Melanie, and was questioned on the subject. 'He is the most extraordinary man! I don't quite know why, but I feel intensely sorry for him. I feel as if I ought to hate him for what he has done to you—and I do in a way—and yet somehow I am sorry for him, all the same.'

'What does he talk to you about, Vangela?' asked Thekla curiously.

'Oh, nothing that would interest you. It was chiefly English politics that he talked about to-night.'

'Bah! politics!' cried Thekla; 'how stupid!' and she skated back to Clothilde Müller with a little grimace.

'It is politics that they speak of, my dear—English politics—think only—how dull! And politics means nothing. I told you so!'

'At the same time, it is lucky that the Stillenheim is not here to-night,' said Clothilde,

with a meaning smile. 'She has not liked to appear again in that hat, I imagine, and the miss may have more cause to be grateful to me than she thinks. I can assure you that Stephanie is sufficiently furious with her already.'

CHAPTER XIV.

A MERE SUSPICION.

ADLOFSTEIN galloped home at a pace which would not have been inappropriate if he had had a pack of fiends and demons behind him instead of an unhappy panting groom, and all the way Evangela's frank and friendly words were ringing in his ears :

'We are compatriots, and should be friends—don't you think so ?'

'No!' he said vehemently to himself; 'no, no! Such a friendship is not for me! I have chosen my lot, and must stick to it. I have no business to expose myself or anyone else to the risk of a calamity which might be more bitter to bear than any other. I do not know what made me go up to her to-night—I had not meant to. What could have possessed me? Ah! I wanted to know whether Bertemilian had been persecuting her. Well, I will not do it

again. In future I will take care to avoid her.'

When he reached home he was informed that the Marquis had already arrived; and he found him in his own den in the turret.

'What!' he said on entering, 'you have not been cheering the Baroness with your society?'

'No,' said St. Evrémonde; 'to tell you the truth, I was somewhat fatigued with my journeyings. I have been posting up and down the country night and day lately, and I was glad of a rest in your comfortable chair. I have turned out the dogs, you see.'

'There are comfortable chairs downstairs, and I hope you won't mind occupying one of them presently, for we take supper with the Baroness. Excuse me for a moment while I get ready.'

Adlofstein passed into the inner room, and St. Evrémonde was left to his own reflections, which were not of the pleasantest nature.

'That old hag!' he thought; 'if I had only known, I would have taken care to have had important business awaiting me in Lindenthal. I only called here because I wanted to know how Adlofstein was, and I feared lest she might have been trying some of her tricks upon him. And now she will have the chance

of experimenting on me! That is the reward one gets for a kind action in this world!'

St. Evrémonde lay back in the easy-chair, looking a good deal less happy and debonair than was his wont. The last few weeks had been a harassing time for him, and in the uncertainty as to what news each post might bring, his mind had been torn by a hundred conflicting emotions. Fifty times a day his conscience had smitten him for disloyalty and dishonour, and fifty times a day he had cursed the ill-luck which had made him the repository of the fatal secret. He started when Adlofstein re-entered the room, and he looked apprehensively at him to see if he wore an aspect of deepened cynicism that betokened suspicion. But Adlofstein's rugged features, though stern, were not more alarming than usual, and through their settled gloom there was an impress of nobility that St. Evrémonde was conscious of for the first time. He was struck, too, by the advantage to which his cousin's tall and massively-built figure showed in evening dress. Adlofstein was careless about dress as a rule, and he usually went about in rough shooting attire, which, as St. Evrémonde indignantly said, was enough to brand him everywhere as an English tourist of the most reckless sort; but out of respect to the Baroness

he always dressed with the utmost punctilio whenever he spent the evening with her, and it made him look like a different man.

'*Per Bacco!*' St. Evrémonde said to himself, 'he is a man whom many a woman would rave about. It is lucky for me that he does not know it.'

'You look decidedly better, Louis, than when I saw you last,' he observed as they descended the winding stair. 'I hope you have not had another attack since then?'

'No,' said Adlofstein; 'I feel all right again now, and I am looking forward to a Christian meal to-night. It will be an agreeable change after the diet of gruel and milk that Hempel has been treating me to for so long.'

He threw open the door of the salon as he spoke, and they found themselves in the presence of the Baroness.

She was sitting on a sofa immediately under a bracket upon which was placed a bust of herself, and the brilliant light, falling full upon her in her gala dress of bright blue satin, revealed with merciless distinctness the contrast between her emaciated figure and the rounded curves of the marble above. She was expecting St. Evrémonde, and she received him with the most stately ceremony, offering him her hand to kiss,

and smiling graciously upon him as he bent to raise it to his lips. He shuddered inwardly as he did it, and the sickening thought occurred to him of what that hand had done, and might soon do again ; but he permitted no trace of his secret loathing to appear as he smilingly offered his arm to lead her in to supper.

The supper was a dinner, really—an elaborate little dinner *à la Russe*, with courses of clear soup, boiled beef, turkey, venison, game and sweets, which had been prepared by a cook cunning in French devices ; and perceiving that the Baroness could have had no hand in the preparations, St. Evrémonde, who was something of a connoisseur in such matters, sat down with an equal mind to gratify the pleasurable anticipations of his inner man.

In the subdued light of the silver lamp that hung from the ceiling and concentrated its radiance upon the glittering dinner-table, the Baroness did not look quite so ghastly as she had done in the fuller light of the drawing-room ; but after the first exchange of civilities with her guest, she began to give play to her eccentricities. She talked volubly to the Marquis ; but she addressed quite as much of her conversation to the butler, who could do nothing to please her. She scolded and abused

him throughout the first courses, and seemed much provoked by the discreet silence that he endeavoured to maintain.

'You see, the stupid ass has nothing to say for himself!' she exclaimed, turning to St. Evrémonde; but at last her persecution proved too much for the man's patience, and a regular wrangle ensued.

St. Evrémonde did not know whether to laugh or look sorry. He was aghast at the notion of becoming involved in the dispute, and he preserved a discreet silence; but he listened with mingled amazement and amusement to the war of words, and he could not help glancing from the excited lady, with her waggling plumes, to his host.

Adlofstein sat in his place at the bottom of the table, grave, calm, dignified, and, to all appearance, absolutely unconcerned.

'He is accustomed to it, no doubt,' thought St. Evrémonde to himself; 'but, *mon Dieu*, what a life! What is the use of wealth and luxury that is all spoilt by a disturbing element like this? Ah, it should be very different if it were my house!'

Adlofstein had found it answer best to let the Baroness have her own servants, and he generally made a point of not interfering in her

management of them, but sometimes it was absolutely necessary to interpose, and he did so at last now.

'Karl,' he said, looking up as if he had noticed nothing unusual, 'go and fetch the liqueurs, and tell them to take the coffee to the salon. We will join you there, Baroness,' he added, turning to his stepmother.

The man left the room on the instant, and peace was restored. The Baroness turned to St. Evrémonde with all the little beads and drops of her head-dress aquiver, and after remarking with a hysterical, half-apologetic laugh upon the trouble that servants always were, continued her fine conversation with him about all the great people she had ever known or heard of. Karl brought in two little bottles of liqueur; but at a glance from Adlofstein he retired instantly, and the ceremony of drinking healths was amicably proceeded with.

'Ah, Marquis, don't take the green,' said the Baroness as Adlofstein filled a glass out of the bottle which had been placed by him, and was about to pass it to his guest; 'the red is far better—I can recommend it;' and she handed him a tiny goblet that she had herself filled from a bottle with a red seal.

She spoke with an eagerness which attracted

St. Evrémonde's attention, and he viewed her offering with suspicion.

'Thank you, I prefer the green,' he said; and taking the glass that Adlofstein had given him, he rose from his chair.

'*Hoch!*' he called out in his clear tenor voice, as he clinked glasses, first with the Baroness and then with Adlofstein. The Baroness was standing up, too, and she had two red spots of excitement that showed even through the rouge on her thin cheeks.

'*Hoch! hoch!*' she cried, giving the Marquis's glass such a knock that some of the contents were spilt upon the table-cloth, and '*Hoch! hoch!*' she repeated still more shrilly and wildly, as Adlofstein came from his place, and silently held out his glass for the salutation.

St. Evrémonde watched her as he drank the strong sweet stuff that was like fragrant fire. 'The she-devil!' he thought; 'she has tried to poison him, and now she cries *hoch!* How soon will she try again, I wonder?'

When the Baroness had left the room, and he found himself alone with Adlofstein, St. Evrémonde sat silent and thoughtful for some moments. Then he said abruptly:

'Is she accountable for her actions, do you suppose?'

'Impossible to say,' replied Adlofstein briefly. Then he added musingly, 'How far is anyone accountable for his actions? It has always seemed to me a most difficult question to decide —and in a case like this—it is clear, however, that the Baroness is a person who is very much to be pitied.'

'Yes,' said St. Evrémonde doubtfully; 'but —I wonder that you can stand it. Why should you cloud your life by having her for the mistress of your house? Why, it is positively unsafe! A fit of madness might come on at any moment, and she might set the place on fire, or throw a knife at you, or do some other mischievous or dangerous thing—you cannot tell what.'

'It would take a good deal to burn this old place down,' said Adlofstein, with a smile. 'I am not afraid of any mischief that she could do to me personally, poor thing! and as to the rest —well, that is my affair. If I choose to take the charge of her upon myself, I do not see that it matters to anybody else.'

It was plain that Adlofstein did not care to discuss the subject, and St. Evrémonde felt uncomfortably that his attempt at a warning had been a failure that would not even avail as a sop to his own conscience, in case—in case—

in case of what? St. Evrémonde was not so hardened in evil-doing as to look at his cousin sitting there in the pride and strength of his manhood, the master of that house and all the honours that went with it, and be able to contemplate calmly the fate which hung over him. In a week, in a day, in an hour—who could tell when?—he might be stripped of all; at any moment he might be struck down by the secret cowardly act of the hand that he did not suspect, and then, after a few hours of agony, all would be over for him, and the person who knew, who might have warned him, would step into his shoes. St. Evrémonde felt a horrible qualm as he realized it; and he felt that he must do or say something to save himself from that dishonour—yet the revelation of the truth seemed too great a sacrifice, and when Adlofstein conducted him into the salon where coffee was in readiness, he had said nothing.

The Baroness was seated before the coffee tray, and she offered St. Evrémonde a cup of coffee with a smile which was intended to be engaging, but the Marquis did not find it so.

'No, thank you,' he said hastily; 'shall I give it to Louis?' and he was about to convey it to the chair by the fire where Adlofstein had

settled himself with a book, when the Baroness stopped him.

'Not that,' she said. 'Louis does not like coffee now, and I have prepared a cup of chocolate for him.'

St. Evrémonde took the cup that she handed to him—a larger one than the beautiful little Dresdens in which the coffee was served, and was about to pass it to Adlofstein, when a sudden idea occurred to him that nearly made his heart stop beating. He glanced at the Baroness, and saw an expression in her face that confirmed him in his conviction. There was a strange gleam in her eyes, and she was watching him with an intentness that did not seem at all warranted by the occasion.

'There is death in this cup—death in a frightful, agonizing form—and it will be my hand that will have administered it to him!' he thought in great agitation. 'I will not—I cannot do it!'

He was crossing the room with the cup and saucer in his hand, and he had no time to think what to do. He was already upon the hearth-rug, and Adlofstein reached out his hand to take the cup from him; but before he had got it, St. Evrémonde gave a lurch and a tilt to the saucer, which sent the cup toppling over. It fell upon

the tiles in the open fireplace, and was smashed to atoms, while the contents were entirely spilt.

'*Nom de Dieu!*' he exclaimed; 'what clumsiness! I cannot imagine how I did it! Will you ever forgive me, my dear Baroness? I hope the cup was not valuable?'

He tossed the chocolate which had fallen into the saucer into the fire as he spoke, and then he turned smiling to the Baroness.

'It was Sèvres, and the special cup that the late Baron always used,' she said; 'but it is no matter.'

She tried to force her face into a smile, but it was an awful contortion. Rage, disappointment, and baffled hate, struggled for the mastery in her expression, and she could not conceal that she was in reality furious. St. Evrémonde had had his back to her when the upset happened, and she had no reason for thinking that it was not accidental; but Adlofstein had had a better view of the occurrence, and he was astonished. He knew that St. Evrémonde was not a man to stumble and commit an awkwardness apropos of nothing at all, and he waited to ask an explanation.

When St. Evrémonde had taken leave of the Baroness, Adlofstein accompanied him to the

courtyard, where his carriage was waiting for him, and as they crossed the great central hall, he turned to him with an abrupt inquiry :

'Why did you smash that cup, and then pretend that it was an accident? You had some object, of course—what was it?'

St. Evrémonde hesitated for a moment. The great entrance-door was thrown open, and they stood upon the flight of steps outside, with the exquisite view of the moonlit valley and the hills stretching before them. St. Evrémonde looked out, and knew that his chances of coming into possession of this goodly heritage trembled in the balance. A word, and he would be resigning his hopes for an indefinite time—perhaps for ever—yet it must be spoken. He had achieved one act of heroism that evening ; he must brace himself up to another.

'To tell you the truth,' he said, 'I do not trust the Baroness, and I have been for some time wishing to warn you against her. I am convinced that she hates you, and there was a look in her face when she handed me that cup to give you that made me fear—well, I hardly know what ; but I remembered that it was after a cup of coffee given to you by her that your illness came on before, you told me ; and I obeyed the impulse that made me prefer to

sacrifice the cup rather than let you run the risk of drinking the contents.'

There was a short pause. Adlofstein was standing in the full light of the moon, and in his face St. Evrémonde could see the intensity of the emotion which shook him. He turned at last, and the brightness of his eyes in their deep setting was like the flash of steel.

'You suspect her of having tried to poison me? You think that the illnesses from which I have suffered were from that, and not from —from anything else?' he said breathlessly. 'But what has led you to such a conclusion? Is there any proof—have you discovered any evidence? My God, Victor! you don't know how much this might mean to me——' He broke off abruptly, in agitation which was too great to allow him to continue, and he waited with desperate anxiety for St. Evrémonde's answer.

The eyes of the Marquis fell before the searching intensity of his gaze, and he looked away down the valley. He knew only too well what the discovery he had made would mean to Adlofstein, and his heart failed him as he realized it. The moment had come for the revelation of the secret, and he knew that it was now or never; but at this moment—this

crucial moment of his life — the weakening effects of a career of idle pleasure and unchecked self-indulgence made themselves felt. St. Evrémonde had never before dishonoured himself by a lie that was criminal as well as base ; but he had never been careful of the truth, and he had placed his own interests above every other consideration, human or Divine. The moral fibre of his nature was rotten through and through, and in the moment of trial it broke down, as rotten things will.

'Evidence!' he said hastily. 'Why, no! what evidence could there possibly be? It is only a guess, of course, but I should think it was a very natural one. You never know what mad people may not do, and they are very cunning in avoiding detection sometimes. At any rate, it could do no harm for you to be on your guard.'

'I see,' said Adlofstein ; and the cloud that settled down again upon his brow seemed deeper than before. 'It is a mere suspicion on your part, then? You haven't any real foundation for it?'

'Oh dear no! It was merely my idea.'

'Thank you,' said Adlofstein quietly. 'It is good of you to be so much interested in my welfare—and disinterested besides ; but this is

an imaginary danger—a delusion. Why should the Baroness wish to destroy me? I have done nothing against her, and she is dependent upon me. She has never shown any homicidal tendency before, and why should there be any danger of it now? Oh no! It is an utterly groundless supposition.'

The sword hung still over Adlofstein's head, and the warning had done nothing to open his eyes to his danger. As he drove through the night in the silent woods, St. Evrémonde told himself that at any rate he had done his duty—he had given his cousin a warning that ought to put him on his guard, and if Adlofstein, in his folly and blindness, chose to disregard it, then he would not be to blame. He tried to derive some satisfaction from this reflection, and he glossed over to himself the lie that had made the warning of no effect; but all the time he knew in his heart that he had crossed the Rubicon and thrown his friend over.

The clocks were striking midnight when the carriage clattered through the cobbled streets of the little town, and drew up under the great arch of the Greifenburg entrance; but late as it was, the Marquis had something that must be done before he retired to rest.

'That paper must be destroyed,' he said to

himself, as he locked himself into his sitting-room ; 'I dare not risk its being found after what has passed to-night. He would put two and two together, and suspect at once. Oh, *mille diables!* what has become of the paper?'

St. Evrémonde sat before the open drawer, with a heap of papers on the writing-table before him, and he rummaged wildly through the pile. No, the paper was not there! He had put it at the very bottom, and he had turned the heap upside down in the expectation of seeing it at once ; but it was not there. The paper was not there ; the paper was gone! St. Evrémonde sat staring into the empty drawer, staring at the fact that stared him back in the face. What could it mean? How could it be? He had locked the drawer, and the key had been in his pocket ever since. Who could have obtained access to it?

St. Evrémonde threw himself back in his chair with his mind in a whirl ; and as the consequences of the calamity came before him, his confusion and bewilderment gave way to blank dismay. What was to be done? Some servant about the Castle must have discovered another key that fitted the lock—or perhaps Adlofstein himself—but no! Adlofstein did not know yet ; his manner that evening could leave no

mistake about that. Then, it must be one of the servants who had taken the paper—Laroche, who was so prying and inquisitive: it was possibly he. In his desperation St. Evrémonde sprang from his chair, and rang the bell furiously. It might be Laroche, and if threats should be of no avail, a bribe might induce him to restore the document; but even as he unlocked the door the Marquis changed his mind. If Laroche had taken the paper, he would be too wily to give it up, and a row about it would only quicken his appreciation of its value, and precipitate the danger of discovery; whereas, if he had not got it, he was the last person whom it was desirable to have on the track. If only it had fallen into the hands of some stupid, ignorant person, who would not perceive that it could be of value to Adlofstein—if by any means it could be kept from Adlofstein! If it were not—if the paper came into his hands—St. Evrémonde's brain reeled as he thought of the scorn and contempt with which Adlofstein would cast him off.

'I must get it back—I must! I must!' he cried.

But before he could determine any plan of action, a new and terrible fear fell upon him. The sudden mental shock that he had received,

or the fatigue of an unusual stretch of rapid travelling and hard work, or some other cause more potent than these, so acted upon him as to make him feel suddenly ill.

St. Evrémonde had never known what it was to be ill ; but now he felt a horrible sensation of helpless misery, and a frightful pang seemed to stab him right through the body. He sank back in his chair, sick and faint, and, as the pain came again like the plunge of a burning knife, a deadly fear rose up in his mind.

'Help me to bed, Laroche,' he gasped, as the sleepy valet appeared in answer to his summons. 'I am ill—I am terribly ill! Send for the doctor at once. I believe I am dying!'

He remembered the green chartreuse that the Baroness had tried to dissuade him from taking. Had that bottle been 'prepared' for Adlofstein, and had he in his folly fallen into the trap?

'My God!' he muttered miserably. But there was little thought of his God in his mind.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROTHENFELS BATTUE.

St. Evrémonde's fears for himself proved without foundation, and he did not die. His illness was unromantically diagnosed by Dr. Hempel as a sharp bilious attack merely; and in the first week of the new year he was quite well again, and able to join in a three days' battue that he was engaged to attend.

Count Rothenfels had a huge square Schloss in the wildest part of the woods and mountains on the north boundary of Moravia, and on this, the great occasion of the season, it was crowded with guests. The Bertemilians were among the first arrivals; and Melanie and Thekla, who had been on the tiptoe of expectation and anticipation for weeks, were radiant with happiness and gaiety. In comparison with them, Evangela seemed like a little quiet mouse, too shy to make or receive

much impression ; but in her quiet way she, too, entered with zest and interest into the novelty and excitement of an unknown world, and in the many strangers who were introduced to her she saw promise of amusement and edification unending.

In a big, bare bedroom, that looked eerily empty and desolate, with its vast expanse of polished parquet, Evangela sat alone in the dim light of the two wax candles on the dressing-table. It was the end of the first day at the Schloss, and, as she brushed out her long dark hair, Evangela was smiling to herself over the events of it. The polite sayings and strange doings of the evening were all in her mind, and she seemed to see again the grace with which St. Evrémonde and the Count Marcel Écoronata, the two most polished cavaliers of the party, had sunk on one knee to kiss the hand of the Countess, their hostess, in saying good-night to her. She was smiling again at the thought of the account which she would send Aunt Anastasia in her next letter, when she was disturbed by a hasty knocking at the door, and the next moment Melanie came in, with a face as white as her dressing-gown.

'Oh, Melanie!' Evangela cried, seeing at

once that something must be amiss. 'What is the matter?'

Melanie sank down upon a quaint *canapé* that was stranded in the midst of the wide sea of uncarpeted flooring, and clasped her hands together without speaking. She looked the picture of despair.

'Melanie, Melanie, do tell me! *What* has happened?'

'Oh, my dear! my dear!' she said at last. 'All is spoilt! All is over! This lovely visit that we have been looking forward to for so long! The Gräfin has just been with me, and who do you think is coming to stay here for the hunt? Adlofstein! He will be at the meet to-morrow—he will stay here afterwards. Adlofstein staying in the same house with papa and us! Dreadful! impossible! Oh, what shall we do?'

'But how inconsiderate! Surely the Rothenfels know——'

'Of course they do; but the Graf is the most selfish, unfeeling, pig-headed old wretch that ever lived! He has had disappointments in his guns, and he is determined to have a good count up this time; so, without saying anything to his wife, he just telegraphed for Adlofstein, who is the best shot in the country. The poor

Gräfin remonstrated with all her might when she found what he had done, but it was no use. He only made her a terrible scene, and she is in absolute despair.'

'Does Baron Adlofstein know that we are here?' asked Evangela breathlessly.

'Oh dear no, of course not! If he did, there would be no fear of his coming. The villainous old fox of a Graf knew that well enough, and he has taken care not to mention a word of our presence here.'

'I wish that I had mentioned to Baron Adlofstein where we were going, on that last evening on the ice,' said Evangela. 'I cannot think how it was that I did not. Then we should have been safe.'

'I don't know *how* I am to tell papa,' said Melanie miserably. 'I suppose I must before the hunt-breakfast to-morrow morning. And what I am so mortally afraid of is, that he will insist upon our going off at once.'

'I really don't see what else he can do.'

'Oh, my dear, don't say that!' cried Melanie, the tears rushing to her eyes. 'You don't know what a terrible disappointment it would be to Thekla and me. Poor Thekla is crying her eyes out now over the very idea; and if it were to happen, I really do not know what she

would do. She would simply howl all the way home. It would be a terrible blow indeed. I am hoping to be able to persuade papa that in so large a party it will be possible for him to keep clear of Adlofstein. He will only be here for the second and third days of the hunt, and there will be such a crowd that it can surely be managed that they do not come in contact. The Gräfin has promised to do all she can for us ; and you, dear Vangela, you will help, too, will you not ?'

'I ?' exclaimed Evangela, startled. 'Why, Melanie, what can I do ?'

'You can pacify papa and keep Adlofstein away from him ; and perhaps you might have an opportunity of convincing the monster how abominably he has behaved to us. He attends to what you say, and you are so fearless. You will do what you can, won't you ? Oh, sweet Vangela, yes ! I am depending on you.'

Evangela looked troubled. She did not think that she could do anything, and she was conscious of a deepening dread and dislike of Baron Adlofstein that amounted to absolute aversion. As she thought of what he had done to the Bertemilians, and saw the effect of the plight that he cast upon their lives, she felt as

if she hated him, and she wished that she might never see him again.

'Oh, I wish—I *wish*,' she said earnestly, 'that he were not coming. If only something would happen to stop him!'

'You do not like him, then?' Melanie asked rather curiously.

'Like him! Like anyone who has acted and is acting so atrociously? How could I? It is perfectly monstrous that he should be allowed to exercise such a wicked tyranny. If I were your father, I really think that, rather than let this state of things continue, I would fight him.'

'Poor papa!' said Melanie mournfully. 'Sometimes I almost wish that he would—and yet how terrible it would be for us in any case! If he fell—and that wretch is as good with his pistol as he is with his sword, and is so malignant that he would show no mercy—if he fell. what would become of us? Even if he escaped with his life, it would be ruin, for he would forfeit his position; and we have scarcely anything to depend upon but his salary. No; I cannot wish that papa should fight. He would, but for our sakes; but as it is, he cannot.'

'I wish I could fight him for you!' said Evangela fervently. 'I would if I were a man.'

Melanie laughed even through her tears as she rose and kissed the fragile-looking little person from whom this warlike speech seemed to come so incongruously.

'Dear, you must fight for us in another way. Oh, I do hope it can be arranged somehow! All was so charming, so delightful, and we should have enjoyed ourselves so much. Think only what the Gräfin has told me—it was St. Evrémonde who suggested to her to invite us, and imagine! she says she thinks he is awfully in love with me. But, dear, don't mention it to papa and Thekla; they tease me enough already, and I don't care for him a bit.'

'Oh, Melanie!' cried Evangela, blushing hotly as Melanie never did over her frankest confidences. 'Are you quite sure? He is so charming. Don't you really care for him at all?'

'Not that much!' said Melanie, marking off about a quarter of an inch of rosy forefinger. 'I know very well what the gallantries of these fine gentlemen from Vienna are worth. Of course, if I had reason to think that he was serious, it would be quite another pair of shoes —but even then I don't know;' and, kissing Evangela another affectionate good-night, she departed smiling.

The next morning, at the crowded hunt-

breakfast, St. Evrémonde sat next to Melanie, and noticing how marked were his attentions, Evangela could not help wondering whether wedding-shoes might not be in question, after all. Apparently the communication that Melanie had been obliged to make to her father had not had the disastrous effects that she had dreaded, for she was in the gayest spirits, and after breakfast Baron Bertemilian, wrapped up to the eyes like all the other guests, escorted his little party down to the courtyard, where the carriages were waiting to convey them to the rendezvous in the forest.

It was a ten-mile drive through the wildest mountain scenery, and the brilliant early morning sunshine on the dazzling snow brought out such exquisite effects that Evangela was sorry when the drive was over. A carriage had been sent to bring Adlofstein direct from the station to the meet, and amongst the group of sportsmen assembled in the forest clearing at the top of a steep mountain slope, where the horses were taken out of the carriages, his tall figure was the first that Evangela saw. The sight of his stern, strong face stirred up all the indignation and resentment which she had felt on the Bertemilians' account the night before, and she resolved that she would take care to keep well

out of his way. This would not be difficult, she thought, since he was evidently one of the most important and best-known guests, and with so many friends to engage his attention he was not likely to have any notice to spare for so insignificant a person as herself. But she was reckoning without her hostess. Already, amidst a deafening confusion of tongues, of grooms flying hither and thither in attendance upon the horses, of coachmen cursing and *Jägers* yelling on all sides, the business of pairing off was going forward, and the sportsmen were eagerly securing partners among the limited number of ladies.

St. Evrémonde had at once engaged Melanie to accompany him, and Evangela, who was standing by them, was listening with a smile to his pressing invitation and Melanie's coquettish acceptance of it, when she became conscious that someone was claiming her attention. She turned quickly round, and saw with astonishment and dismay that the Countess had come up with Adlofstein at her elbow.

'You are acquainted with Fräulein Vangela, I think, Baron Adlofstein,' she was saying gracefully, 'and I know you speak her language perfectly. May I, then, commit her to your charge?'

Adlofstein bowed with an impassive countenance, and the Countess turned away, leaving him standing by the partner she had given him. It had plainly been her doing, and not his, and Evangela, to whom such a contingency had never occurred, stood silent and confounded. Adlofstein was also silent for a few moments; but as a green-clad *Jäger* came up to conduct him to his appointed post, he turned to his unwilling companion with a grim smile.

'This is a sad blow to you, I see,' he said, with cynical frankness. 'I can assure you, however, that I am not to blame; I did not choose you for my partner, and I will let you off as much as I can. You need not dance with me to-night, and you can be as silent as you like now. I shall not bore you with talking, for shooting is a business that takes up my attention entirely.'

Evangela made no answer. She felt too much annoyed to speak. She was tingling all over with anger and vexation, and yet the sound of the refined and cultivated English tones that struck her as a fresh surprise every time that he spoke to her was so pleasant to her ear that she would scarcely have wished the disagreeable speech exchanged for the

compliment which a German partner would have addressed to her.

They were descending a steep hill by a rough cart-track that wound in and out of the pine-woods, and down at the bottom of the valley they could see a troop of wild-looking peasants already hurrying off to beat the woods. The snow was deep in the drifts below; but the slope of the hill had been swept clear by the wind, and it was not difficult walking. Evangela, however, seemed too much intent upon picking her way to have any attention to spare, and she was evidently disposed to take instant and literal advantage of the permission to keep silence. This was not what Adlofstein had expected, and he became impatient.

'Why did you keep back from me that you were coming here?' he demanded suddenly. 'Why could you not have mentioned it that evening when we met on the ice?'

Evangela looked up to see his dark gray eyes bent upon her under frowning brows which would have intimidated most girls; but she met the glance with an answering flash.

'I did not mention it, simply because it never occurred to me to do so,' she said, with a coldness that Adlofstein had not heard in her voice

before. 'It is a pity I did not; you cannot possibly regret it more than I do.'

'Why?' he asked quickly. 'Why do you regret it?'

'Because, then, I think that, knowing the mortification and annoyance that your presence here causes my friends, you might have had enough good feeling to stay away.'

'I don't know about that,' said Adlofstein, his face hardening into iron lines. 'There is no reason why I should go out of my way in order to spare a man whom I have such good cause to hate as Bertemilian.'

'Why do you hate him?'

'You need not ask that, Miss Wynne,' he said sternly; 'you must know the reason well enough.'

'I know of no sufficient reason. I know that you believe him to be responsible for the death of your father; and I know that that is a mistake. I am quite certain that Baron Bertemilian had nothing at all to do with it.'

'How can you be certain about a thing that it is impossible for any human being to know?'

'The Baron himself would have told me. He would have told me without knowing that he did so. He has not done what you think. He is not a man who can keep a secret—he is

too transparent; and if he had anything like that upon his conscience, he would betray it ten times a day to anyone who lived in the same house with him, and had eyes to see.'

'People usually see what they wish to see, and not the reverse,' said Adlofstein coldly.

'Yes; but that applies to you as well as to others, Baron Adlofstein. You wished to find the murderer of your father, and you chose to see him in Baron Bertemilian because there was no one else you could think of.'

Adlofstein turned fiercely upon her. He was thoroughly roused, and he looked like an angry lion.

'Do you think, then, that he was not murdered? There was no other man but Bertemilian with whom he could have had a quarrel, and you say that it was not he. How was it, then? Do you dare to tell me that my father was mad, and that he killed himself?'

Evangela trembled a little. She was fearless enough; but she could not see unmoved such agitation as was betrayed in Adlofstein's face and manner.

'I don't know,' she said, faltering for a moment. 'It is impossible to say how it may have been; but some day it may be found out. I hope—oh, I hope that it will; and then you

will find that I am right. I am certain—I am absolutely certain—that Baron Bertemilian was in no way concerned with it.'

An intense conviction is more convincing than argument; and it is efficacious in proportion to its intensity. Nothing carries conviction like conviction itself; and the leaders of men in all ages, understanding this, when they want to convince other men, take care to be convinced themselves first.

'That is mere asseveration; how can you be certain when you have no proof?' Adlofstein demanded; but there was in his tone an indication that her words had not been altogether without effect.

'I know it from my knowledge of the Baron's character,' Evangela said earnestly. 'I can bring forward no absolute proof, certainly; but neither can you—while I know how plainly every word that he says, every change of expression on his face when the subject comes up, refutes your supposition. Baron Bertemilian has not got a strong character. He has been forced by circumstances to one act of moral courage, the moral courage necessary to brave the opinions of his world; but he suffers for it—he suffers terribly—and the bitter part of it to him is that he feels it to be so undeserved. He

is a man who has walked delicately all his life in fear of treading on his neighbours' corns, and yet this calamity has overtaken him. It seems to him a cruel irony of fate.'

'You make an excellent special pleader,' observed Adlofstein grimly, 'and your heart is evidently in the business. You are very sorry for Bertemilian?'

'Yes, I am sorry for him—I am intensely sorry for him; but I think you would be more to be pitied than he is if ever the day came in which you found out that you had been making a mistake. That all this time you had been wreaking your vengeance upon an innocent man; that you had persecuted his wife to death, shadowed the lives of his young daughters, and destroyed his happiness, all for nothing; that you had so concentrated your mind upon this false suspicion that you had made yourself blind and deaf to the clues which might have led you to the true solution. I should not envy you your feelings then.'

'I wonder how you can suppose that such a brute as you make me out to be can have any feelings at all!' said Adlofstein, with the coolness of a deeply-seated cynicism.

Evangela was silent; and if he hoped for some apology or disclaiming remark, Adlof-

stein was disappointed. They walked on silently along the snowy track until they came to the foot of a projecting crag on the hillside, which Adlofstein abruptly announced to the huntsman was a post that would suit him, and there he settled down to his work.

There was a great silence in the woods, and the two men were so still that Evangela, standing in the shadow of the towering rock, could have fancied herself all alone. She drew her warm furs round her, and gazed into the white desolation of the unbroken solitudes for what seemed a long time. It was her duty—as Melanie had carefully explained before starting—to keep a sharp look-out for the wild creatures of the woods, and instantly to call her partner's attention to them when they appeared ; but Evangela did not do her duty that day. Through the silence, she could hear in the far distance the occasional faint cries of the approaching beaters, and all at once a sound close by, like the crack of a tiny pistol, made her start.

She glanced at Adlofstein, and saw him lift his gun to his shoulder, while his keen eyes swept the woods. It was only a rotten twig breaking under its burden of snow, and Adlofstein lowered his gun again. But Evangela

had seen what he had not, a brown and dappled form that was almost indistinguishable in the thicket. It stood motionless on the edge of the underwood, with its nostrils dilated and its graceful antlers thrown back, evidently scenting danger. It was a splendid stag, and Evangela watched it breathlessly, hoping that it would escape. She glanced apprehensively at Adlofstein—but, ah! he must have seen. He was taking aim, and the next moment he fired, the report of the gun nearly deafening Evangela. She could not repress a little cry as she saw a big brown hare leap up into the air and fall dead on its back on the snow; but she was glad that it was not the stag, and she secretly rejoiced as she saw it turn and disappear like a flash of lightning in the underwood. Adlofstein caught sight of its horns as it went, and sent a shot after it, but without effect.

'Pity I did not see that first!' he remarked in German. 'I would rather bring down one roebuck than ten hares. You did not do your duty that time, Fräulein. It had twelve branches, too—a great pity to lose it! You must warn me when you see anything. Don't speak, but just touch my arm and point; the least touch will be enough.'

The admonition was wasted upon Evangela. At least, she never once acted upon her instructions, and she was no help at all to her partner. But he had no particular reason to complain of his luck, for roebucks, does, hares, and winged game of all sorts, came flying out of the thicket at the approach of the beaters, and Adlofstein missed nothing that he fired at. Evangela could not withhold some amount of admiration as she witnessed his skill, and after a time she began to feel an involuntary elation in his success.

'You think me a brutal, cut-throat sort of fellow, I perceive,' observed Adlofstein coolly, when the *Jäger*, having picked up the spoil, counted and triumphantly announced the imposing number of the slain; 'but one cannot help the way in which one was made. I was made without the finer feelings, and as every man is but a quotation from his ancestors, the fault lies as much on their shoulders as mine.'

'I don't agree with you—or Emerson,' said Evangela quietly; 'and that comparison seems to me untrue and misleading. If you think of it, you can scarcely call a quotation that which is a new combination out of two sets of old materials.'

'I don't object to an alteration in the phrase,

and I will say that we are misquotations from our ancestors, if you prefer it,' he said sardonically. 'The fact remains that certain tendencies and characteristics are transmitted to us without will or choice of our own, and we have no power to resist their natural action. If circumstances are favourable for their development—and there seems to be a special irony of fate that usually arranges the most favourable conditions for the growth of mischief—we are helpless. The most desperate resolves, the strongest principles, all will go down like ninepins before a hurricane in the hour of temptation, and the inherited nature will hold full sway.'

Evangela did not answer; but her silence was more eloquent than words could have been just then. She had told him once before that she did not believe in the theory of a blind fate, of which human beings were the playthings, and as he looked into her face, and saw the clear light in her eyes, and the grave, sweet lines of her mouth, Adlofstein recognized, as it were, the beautiful reflection of an assurance in which he had not altogether lost faith; for beauty, in that it is the reflection of God, is subjective.

'I know,' he said quickly; 'you believe in a creed which offers a simple solution of such

difficulties. And you are satisfied? Well, I am not exactly an infidel myself, and yet——'

He broke off suddenly, and the sentence was never finished, for the huntsman, who had stayed behind in charge of the heap of game, now came running towards them, shouting and gesticulating violently.

'The gibbering idiot! what on earth is the matter with him?' ejaculated Adlofstein, in a tone of intense irritation; but his voice softened as he spoke to the man, who came up panting. 'The wrong way, is it? But it will take us up to the top if we follow the ridge. It does not matter about the climb, thank you. You can go back to your charge; I know the way quite well.'

Evangela noticed now, for the first time, that, in following a path which wound through the wood at a lower elevation than that by which they had come, they were approaching the bottom of the valley, and her attention was suddenly attracted by a remarkable formation of the ground—a rift in the solid rock, which yawned like a chasm between the two hill slopes, and separated them.

'What an extraordinary crevasse!' she exclaimed, as they came nearer, and looking over the edge of the precipice, she saw a turbid little

stream tumbling in the deep channel a hundred feet below.

'It isn't a crevasse,' said Adlofstein, 'though I admit that in this snow it looks like one. It is a natural formation of the rock, deepened, it may be, by the action of water, but probably volcanic in its origin.'

'It is very curious—dangerous, too, I should think,' Evangela remarked, peering with interest into the dark depths.

'Yes; not a bad place to poke one's enemy down into on a dark night,' Adlofstein assented. 'There is some romantic love-story associated with it, I believe, but I forget the particulars. I have no memory for such things.'

'That is to say, you have no interest in them?'

'I suppose not. No'—with scornful emphasis—'such matters have certainly no particular interest for me.'

Evangela glanced at the powerful rugged face, and saw that the gray eyes had suddenly become dark and stern. She was repelled by his tone and manner, and yet she felt an interest that she could not account for. It was strange how impossible it seemed to keep up, in his presence, the contempt and disapproval that she felt he really deserved.

'I see that there is a plank bridge lower down,' she observed, looking down the curious cleft in the rock, which, widening in the middle of the valley, seemed to close up again at the further end; 'it is for the convenience of the peasants, I suppose; or is it only for the use of the beaters to-day? Here it seems narrow enough to jump across—I think I could almost manage it myself.'

In their gradual upward ascent, they had reached a point at which the lips of the chasm so nearly approached each other that, to an unpractised eye, the leap did indeed appear easy, and Evangela looked across with an adventurous glance.

I should like to see what the crack looks like from the other side.' she said.

'You had better not try,' Adlofstein said crushingly; 'this is supposed to be the very scene of the accident, and it is about some gentle lady who required her lover to jump it that the story runs. She wanted a flower that grew on the other side, or some such nonsense, and he was infatuated enough to risk his life in order to gratify her. He jumped, and jumped short, so fell to the bottom, and was smashed to smithereens, and in her remorse and despair she threw herself after him—at least, that is

what the legend says. I think myself that the last part is probably apocryphal; it seems a good deal more likely that, with the usual practical good sense of her sex, she consoled herself with another flower, and married the next heir.'

When Adlofstein chose to make himself disagreeable, he could do so with a thoroughness which admitted of no mistake, and he was evidently bent upon showing himself in his true colours to-day. Evangela could not know that, as he stood by her side on the brink of the precipice, he was gazing into a gulf far deeper and more impassable—an unseen pit that yawned between him and his companion, and threatened him with a worse danger than that which had befallen the hapless knight of the legend. It was the realization of this which had inspired his repellent mood, and now he turned abruptly away from the place.

'Come,' he said coldly; 'we are wasting time, and we shall be late for luncheon. The others have probably reached the rendezvous long ago.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LADY'S LEAP.

When Evangela and her escort emerged from the woods, they found a gay and animated luncheon-picnic going on in the snow. It had been a successful morning, and everyone—including the master of the revels—was in the best possible humour. Count Rothenfels had a little note-book in his hand, in which he was entering and totting up the results of the morning's work, and when he obtained from Adlofstein the final and crowning count, a smile lit up his foxy countenance, in the light of which he appeared almost amiable. It appeared that Adlofstein had not disappointed the general expectation that his would be the biggest bag, and in the excess of his good-humour the old Count addressed a compliment to Evangela upon the prowess to which she had inspired her partner. Adlofstein, however, interposed with a relentless statement of fact :

'You don't owe any of it to the Fräulein, I assure you, Count,' he said uncompromisingly. 'Instead of wishing me success, and helping to ensure it, as I explained to her was her duty, she was quietly putting up prayers for the safety of every creature that came within range, and willing me to miss each time that I fired. Yes, Fräulein, you know you were secretly rejoiced that I lost that stag—you thought that I did not guess your feelings, but I was well aware of them.'

The stag with the twelve branches was evidently a sore point with Adlofstein, for he had not had a chance of another, and St. Evrémonde, who was not a particularly good shot, had beaten him in that respect. Melanie had pointed it out to her partner, and she boasted joyously of this service. St. Evrémonde's devotion to her was more marked than ever, and she was in the most radiant spirits. After luncheon the Marquis proposed that while the horses were being put in they should go to see the Lady's Leap. Melanie had expressed an eager wish to see the spot, and as the Countess raised no objection, the younger members of the party started off, making the woods ring with their laughing voices.

Adlofstein was among them, but he had been

buttonholed by a local magnate in the little crowd of shooting-men in the rear, and when he came up to the place one of the younger ladies of the house-party was in the midst of a romantic recital of the story.

The full-blooded German sentiment of this account was a remarkable contrast to the version which had disturbed the echoes an hour before, and Adlofstein, who often found himself cursed with too keen a sense of humour for the occasion, stopped to listen with a sarcastic smile. He looked round for Evangela, to see what impression it was making upon her ; but she was not in the group, and he divined that she had slipped away to explore upon her own account.

'But,' said Melanie, her natural vivacity asserting itself to break the impressive pause which followed upon the pathetic wind-up of the tragedy—'but, my dear ladies, he must surely have been a poor jumper, this unfortunate cavalier. It isn't such a very difficult feat. Why, I should think *anybody* could jump it.'

An animated discussion immediately arose among the men upon the raising of this point, and one or two of them adopted Melanie's view, but most of them were of an opposite opinion. Count Marcel d'Écoronata, a gallant officer of the Hussars, who wore his smart uniform upon this,

as upon every possible occasion, was not prone to err on the side of rashness where personal safety was concerned ; and he expressed a very decided opinion that the leap was an impossible feat. St. Evrémonde, first out of compliment to Melanie, and then out of obstinacy at being contradicted, maintained that it was well within the powers of any ordinarily athletic person.

'Impossible!' he laughed, incited to irritation by the little Count Marcel's serious persistency ; 'you shall see. I will soon show you whether it is so impossible ;' and as he spoke he stepped a few paces backwards.

The party were beginning to scatter, and Adlofstein, with some others of the sportsmen who intended to go on to the coverts on the further mountain, and return later than the ladies, was on the point of moving off, when he saw his cousin's action and perceived his intention. He stopped short instantly, and his face took an expression of extreme disgust and disapproval.

'Don't be such a fool as to risk your life for nothing, Victor,' he called out in a tone of command. 'There is a narrow place lower down where you can get across by a plank bridge——'

But his sentence was never finished. It was not for nothing that St. Evrémonde had

boasted to Melanie and Thekla that neither his cousin nor any other man could prevent him from doing what he had a mind to. He heard Adlofstein's warning, but he did not heed it, and the smile on his lips deepened to a more determined obstinacy as he took his run.

Though he was slightly under the middle size, St. Evrémonde had a compact, well-built figure, and some of its grace was owing to long training in fencing, boxing, and gymnastic exercise of all sorts. He was perfectly certain of his powers, and he sprang from the edge with the fullest confidence of reaching the other side ; but he had not counted upon the slipperiness of the ground and the treacherous nature of the snow. It broke away under him as he jumped, and when his feet touched the opposite edge, it slipped again. He bent forward, clutching with his hands ; but he was upon the very edge, and the crust of snow cracked off and toppled over. He made another desperate clutch at the face of the precipice as his feet slipped over with the snow, and he caught something with one hand ; then he fell with a jerk, and only his left hand, clinging to a slender root sticking out of the rock, held him up over the abyss.

It had all happened in a moment, and

Melanie's shriek was echoed by a murmur of horror from the rest of the panic-stricken spectators as they realized the hopelessness of the situation.

'The plank bridge,' said Adlofstein in hoarse tones that did not sound like his own; but as he glanced down the valley and saw how far off it was, he knew that there would not be time to go round. If help was to be of any avail to St. Evrémonde, it must come at once. The frail support to which he was clinging was one of the smaller roots of a young pine that was growing on the edge of the precipice not a yard above him. It had become exposed through the crumbling away of the earth in some winter storm, and had then grown inwards again, so that it formed a kind of twisted loop; but it was a terribly insecure support, and even if it held fast, it was not possible for the Marquis to sustain his whole weight by one hand above that dizzy depth for many minutes.

Adlofstein stood motionless, measuring the width of the gap with his eye, and as he hesitated, an agonized cry burst from the unhappy man.

'Help me quickly, this instant, or I shall perish! The root is beginning to give!'

But it was not to those on the other side that

the appeal was addressed. St. Evrémonde's despairing eyes had caught sight of what the others saw an instant later, a girlish figure advancing through the trees. It was Evangela, who, having crossed by the bridge lower down, had been tempted to walk along the precipice in order that she might get a view of the Lady's Leap from the other side. She came quickly along with light and springy footsteps, and a happy smile on her young, bright face ; but the moment that she caught sight of the group on the other side she saw that something was wrong. She hurried forward, and as his despairing cry fell upon her ears, she met St. Evrémonde's eyes.

'Help me, mademoiselle! Oh, help me, or I shall be dashed to pieces!'

Evangela stood for a moment as if petrified. She gazed at him with horror-stricken eyes and blanched cheeks, and it seemed as if she were paralyzed by the awfulness of his danger. Then she realized that there was not a second to be lost, and acting more by instinct than through any reasoning process, she sprang towards him.

'What is she going to do?' cried d'Écoronata from the other side. 'She is mad! She will be dragged over—ah—ah! oh, God in heaven!'

But Evangela had not been dragged over. Acting on what was really a sort of inspiration, she had thrown herself on to the sapling pine that grew just above where St. Evrémonde was clinging, and grasping the slight trunk firmly with her arm and hand, she leaned over and stretched out her other hand to the Marquis. He caught at it instantly, and it saved him just in time. The earth and stones were beginning to crumble away from the loosening root that he was holding on to, but with the lessening of the strain, as he received support from the other side, it ceased to give.

For the moment he was safe; and an irrepressible cry of applause burst from the spectators of the English girl's brave act. But it was only a reprieve. St. Evrémonde had got a grip upon the girl's wrist that would hold like grim death. But how long would she be able to endure the strain? How long would the slender arm thrown round the tree hold to its grasp? Two lives were in danger now instead of one, and it was only a question of time, as Melanie saw.

'Where is the bridge?' she shrieked. 'Oh run! run quickly! There may yet be time!'

The little Hussar and two or three others flew off; but Adlofstein, who knew that it was

a hopeless errand, did not accompany them. There was only one way in which a rescue could have any chance of being in time, and he did not hesitate now. He drew a few paces back, and, motioning the others to stand aside, took a rapid run. As soon as they perceived his design, the ladies burst into cries of warning and alarm, and Count Rothenfels rushed forward to restrain him ; but Adlofstein shook him off with almost savage energy, and hurled himself at the venture.

The chasm was wider at the point that he was obliged to take than the place that his cousin had essayed, and the risk was therefore greater ; but Adlofstein's immense strength and length of limb stood him in good stead, and he got across in safety. The next moment he was by Evangela's side, and had gripped St. Evrémond by the wrist of the hand that was holding on to hers.

'Let her go,' he said imperiously. 'I have got you. Let go of her hand, I say !'

St. Evrémonde was plainly unwilling to relinquish the grasp upon which his safety had hitherto depended. But he was forced to do so at last, and as Evangela fell back, Adlofstein took her place, and, with a single exertion of his great strength, dragged his cousin into safety.

'Louis, Louis, you have saved my life!' cried St. Evrémonde, as, white and shaken, he stumbled on to his feet.

But Adlofstein had no attention to spare for him. He had turned to Evangela, whose nerve and strength failed her all at once, now that the tremendous strain of the last few moments was relaxed, and he was only just in time to save her from falling to the ground as her senses slipped away from her.

He held her insensible in his arms, and as he looked at the delicate face, and saw the startling contrast that its dead whiteness made with the jetty hair and the long black lashes that swept her cheeks, a strange pang of anguish assailed him, and his heart seemed for a moment to stop beating.

'She has fainted!' he called out. 'One of you ladies have the goodness to come round immediately. Something must be done to revive her.'

Melanie lost no time in responding to this summons, and in her anxiety about her cousin, the crossing of the plank bridge, which under ordinary circumstances would have been an impossible undertaking for her, lost half its terrors. When she reached the spot, she found Evangela lying, still unconscious, upon

a coat—St. Evrémonde's—that was spread upon the ground, and Adlofstein, kneeling in the snow, bending over her, vainly trying to give her brandy out of his silver hunting-flask. St. Evrémonde, standing by in his shirt-sleeves, and in a state of irrepressible emotion, was giving vent to his feelings in an outburst of praise and admiration.

'Noble girl!' he ejaculated, with kindling enthusiasm. 'Brave creature! she has saved my life, and she has risked her own in the attempt. Heaven grant that she be not injured! How charming she looks! *Mon Dieu!* how shall I ever sufficiently prove my gratitude?'

'Hadn't you better reserve yourself until she can hear you?' suggested Adlofstein dryly, without looking up from the task of chafing the unconscious girl's hands that engaged him. 'It seems a pity that the first freshness of your sentiments should be wasted upon deaf ears. She will be able to appreciate them as they deserve presently.'

The time seemed long in coming, however; and Melanie was quite unable to restrain her sobs as she joined her efforts to those of Adlofstein without the least success.

'What is to be done?' demanded Count

Rothenfels, coming up, and glowering with manifest impatience at the scene. 'My English horses have been put in, and are getting wild with waiting, and my wife will be getting equally wild with nervousness and anxiety. Trust the women for making trouble!'

The reaction from a great alarm was working its inevitable effect upon the Count's irritable temper, and he was annoyed besides by a prevision that this would be a break-up of the shooting for that day. That his fears were justified in the case of his best shot became immediately evident.

'The English horses must not be sacrificed to any such paltry consideration as feminine weakness,' Adlofstein said, with a heavy frown. 'Let us go.'

'And the poor young mees?' asked Count Marcel, glancing first at the unconscious Evangela, and then at Melanie, who stood by, speechless with indignation.

'We cannot leave her to perish of cold, certainly. She must be carried, I suppose.'

'I will send some of the servants——' said Count Rothenfels.

But Adlofstein interrupted him:

'Do not trouble. I will carry her myself.'

'You, Adlofstein?' said the Count hastily.

'But it is the wrong direction; and you are coming to shoot with us. You are not going to desert us?'

'Yes, I am,' replied Adlofstein uncompromisingly. 'I am not going to shoot any more. Come; the English horses are waiting. Let us start. You, Baroness, will doubtless accompany us.'

He bent down and raised the slight figure with as much ease and unconcern as he might have picked up a doll, and then he walked off, leaving St. Evrémonde to resume his coat and follow with Melanie. St. Evrémonde was too much shaken and upset to think of going on with the shooting-party, and he even found it difficult to keep up with his tall cousin, who strode ahead as if his burden were a mere feather-weight. Melanie was forced to accommodate her pace to that of the Marquis, who claimed all her sympathy and attention, and so they had fallen a little behind when Adlofstein came to the bridge. A couple of planks laid across the rocky lips of the abyss did not seem a very safe mode of transit for anyone so laden as he was; and Melanie, who dreaded the ordeal not a little for herself, trembled and held her breath when she saw him stop short in the middle, and pause as if to steady himself. It

seemed as if he were afraid of losing his balance ; but he went on again with a firm step.

It was a movement of Evangela's that had disturbed him. In the very middle of the crossing she had stirred slightly, and opened her eyes ; and in their questioning wonder, as she gazed up into his face, there was an expression that made even Adlofstein's iron nerves falter.

'Where am I ? What has happened ?' she asked in utter bewilderment, as her eyes fell from his face to the breast-pocket of the rough gray shooting-coat against which her head was resting. Then, as recollection flashed suddenly upon her : 'Baron Adlofstein, there is no need for you to carry me. Put me down—please put me down this instant !'

If he had obeyed her she must have lost her life the next instant, and he paid no attention to the imperious injunction ; but even when he had got to the end of the perilous crossing, he still held her fast, and showed not the slightest intention of releasing her.

'Be patient,' he said quietly. 'We shall soon meet the carriage that has been sent for, and then I will put you down. It is not right for you to walk, and you must submit to remaining in my clutches for a little while longer. Here is your cousin.'

He looked back for Melanie, all whose courage had been needed to get her over the formidable crossing, and when she came up, he said to her :

'Your cousin has come to herself. She is alarmed at finding herself in my hands. Speak to her, and reassure her, if you can.'

Melanie pushed forward to look anxiously into Evangela's face, and, as she met the distressed glance of the dark eyes, she burst into a little cry of joy.

'Oh, my darling Vangela ! How relieved and thankful I am to see your dear eyes open again ! I have been so alarmed about you. Oh, my dear ! you have been in a swoon for a long, long time, and the Baron is carrying you until the carriage meets us. Count Marcel has gone for it, and it will be here directly. Don't distress yourself, *petite ;* the Baron says you are as light as a feather, and he is so strong, he does not feel it. Ah, Vangela ! No—no, you must not try to walk. It is really not fit. You must have perfect rest till you are better. Think only—the dance is to be to-night, and what a pity if you are not able to enjoy it !'

'I am afraid there can be no question of dancing for mademoiselle to-night,' said Adlofstein decisively. 'She ought to go straight to

bed the moment she gets home, and remain there until she has recovered from the strain and shock.'

He had no intention of speaking unkindly; but he could scarcely realize what a blow to both girls this fiat would be. To Melanie, who had been looking forward to the appearance of all three in the new pink dresses at the hunt dinner and dance as the crowning delight and triumph of the visit, the disappointment was especially severe. What! was poor Evangela to be prevented from appearing, from wearing the charming *rose toilette*, from sharing in the fun, and enjoying an experience which would all have been so interesting and novel to her? Melanie's own pleasure was quite damped by the idea, and she was conscious of a feeling of irritation and resentment against the formulator of it.

'We shall see about that,' she said haughtily. 'I trust that a good rest this afternoon will put you all right, dear Vangela. You do not feel ill, do you?'

Evangela felt at that moment nothing but an overwhelming desire to be released from the position of durance in which she found herself.

'I am perfectly well,' she said energetically. 'There is nothing on earth the matter with me.

Baron Adlofstein, I am the best judge of what I am capable of. Let me beg of you to put an end to this ridiculous situation. I insist that you put me down.'

'In a few minutes,' replied Adlofstein, quite unmoved. 'I see the carriage coming. It is a bad road, and you will be a good deal more jolted than you are now. However, I dare say you will prefer it.'

Evangela thought she would greatly prefer it, and she gave a sigh of relief when she was set down at last, and she found herself once more her own mistress. She felt more unsteady on her feet than she expected, however, and she found, to her surprise and vexation, that she could not get into the carriage without help. Adlofstein half handed, half lifted her in, and as Melanie followed, and St. Evrémonde took his place opposite, she leaned back, and closed her eyes with a sense of intense exhaustion.

Adlofstein, standing grave and silent at the carriage-door with folded arms and an impassive expression of countenance, showed no disposition to join himself to the party. There was a dark flush upon his cheek-bone, and his eyes were steadily fixed upon Evangela; but the lines of his mouth were iron grim. The

coachman was gathering up his reins, when Evangela suddenly opened her eyes, and, turning her head, met Adlofstein's gaze.

'Are you not coming with us?' she asked, in some surprise.

'No,' he answered; and the brief negative was like the *riposte* of a fortress wall.

The carriage was already in motion, and Evangela had no particular reason to regret that he should be left behind; but some sudden impulse made her turn her head and look again at him, and involuntarily she held out her hand.

'Thank you for what you have done for me, Baron Adlofstein—thank you!' she said quickly; but he did not seem to hear.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNT-DANCE.

'I PRAY for the honour, Fräulein!'

'I also.'

'And I.'

'And I.'

Clink, clink, clink! '*Hoch, hoch, hoch!*'

It was eight o'clock; and the big hunt-dinner, which had begun at six, was at an end. Evangela found herself the heroine of the hour; and the guests, who were all springing up from their places to salute each other, came crowding round her, bearing their deep vase-shaped champagne-glasses aloft. There was an enthusiastic crying of '*Hochs!*' and a general confusion of clinking and laughing going on all round; and Evangela's own spirits were at fever height.

The prudent counsels of Adlofstein and the Countess and other more sober spirits had been

disregarded; and the three pink frocks were *en évidence*, with all the effect that Melanie had so fondly anticipated. The pink roses in Evangela's cheeks were more brilliant than the pale pink of her dress, and the contrast with her white skin and blue-black hair was almost startling; but she had never looked prettier, and she was in such bright and happy spirits that Count Marcel d'Écoronata, who was the fortunate man deputed by the Countess to take her in to dinner, was unaffectedly charmed with his good luck. She had, however, made up her mind to abstain from dancing; and when the dinner was over, and the guests poured into the dancing-room, she settled herself under the wing of the Countess in a quiet nook, where she could see and hear without being observed.

The rooms all opened into each other, as well as into the inner corridor which ran round the building; and to-night the folding doors of the whole suite were thrown open. The big drawing-room in the centre was the ball-room, and in the billiard-room at the further end the non-dancing men—Count Rothenfels, Adlofstein, and a few other ungenial spirits, found a refuge. The Countess's boudoir was given up to cards and chaperons; but some of the elder

ladies preferred to settle themselves in the Chinese salon, a small room between the ball-room and the boudoir, and here, as she was passing through the ball-room, Melanie discovered Evangela.

'Ah, Vangela dear!' she said compassionately. 'Are you going to hide yourself here? Perhaps it is better, since you must not dance, for you not to sit in the ball-room, where you would be continually bowed to, and have to explain, and perhaps give offence by refusing; but it is miserable for you! It makes me quite wretched to think of your being so disappointed!'

'Oh, never mind me; I don't mind,' said Evangela cheerfully. 'But one thing I am determined about: I will come in to see the cotillon!'

'Oh, you must come in for that; everybody comes in to see that. And it will be splendid to-night. I hear that the Countess has prepared the most charming things—windmills, looking-glasses, pop-guns — oh, I forget all! And the little Marcel is to lead it. He is unequalled at the cotillon, they say, and his figures are something marvellous—oh, you will see! Pity that you cannot join! Such bouquets you would have had, for all these gentlemen

are enraptured with you, my dear! Your beauty, your cleverness, your heroism — they cannot praise you enough! As for Count Marcel—*ma chère*, what have you done to that poor little man? Ah! there I see St. Evrémonde going past the doorway, and I should not wonder if he was looking for me. It is the first dance beginning, and I must be in my place, or I shall get no partner.'

Melanie flitted off like a gay bird, and Evangela was left to her reflections. She found that she would have plenty of leisure for meditation and observation; for the Countess, though good-naturedly anxious to befriend the young English stranger, and desirous to talk to her, had a good many other claims upon her attention. She was called away before long, and as the evening advanced, the other ladies were attracted into the boudoir or the dancing-room, until the Chinese room was left deserted. Evangela, ensconced in an easy-chair drawn up to an elaborately inlaid Chinese cabinet, amused herself for a time by examining the curious and beautiful things that it contained; but this was not an occupation that could be indefinitely prolonged, and she was beginning to think that she also had better make a move, when she saw M. de St. Evré-

monde come in from the ball-room, and give a hasty glance round the room.

'Ah, Mademoiselle Vangela, there you are!' he said, coming straight up to her. 'I could not conceive where you had hidden yourself.'

'My cousin Melanie could have told you, monsieur,' said Evangela, with a smile and a slight deepening of colour.

'She could, no doubt, but she would not do so. She said that you were to be kept quiet—but, mademoiselle, you will allow me a few minutes, will you not? I have not yet had a chance of thanking you for the noble way in which you came to my rescue this afternoon, when I was in danger of perishing by a horrible death——'

'Do not speak of it!' said Evangela hurriedly. 'It is too dreadful to think of! I am thankful indeed that you were saved, but you must remember that it was Baron Adlofstein, not I, who really saved you.'

'He would have come too late. I do not know that he would have ventured the leap at all, if it had not been for the inspiring sight of your heroism. Ah! yes, mademoiselle, it is to you that I owe my life, and I can never sufficiently express the gratitude that I feel.'

As he looked at the sweet and blushing face,

whose prettiness struck him with new force, St. Evrémonde felt that he did not dislike the notion of owing his life to so charming a woman, and, bending down, he lifted her hand, and softly touched it with his lips. Evangela had seen him do it to the Countess each time that he had said 'good-night' to her, and she knew that for him the action was quite natural, but she was utterly unprepared for it, and she was greatly confused and disconcerted. She could not find a word to say, and as she felt the hot colour mounting to her very temples, she was vexed with herself for being so stupid; but the Marquis did not mind at all, he only thought her the more charming. He felt rather noble himself in his consciousness of the sincerity of his emotion; and, seating himself in the chair that the Countess Rothenfels had left vacant, he disposed himself for an agreeable *tête-à-tête*.

The light of the shaded lamps threw a soft and rosy radiance over the room—over the gorgeous and grotesque Chinese curiosities and Evangela's pink dress; and from the dancing-room came the wail of the violins in the Strauss waltz music, which rose and fell in dreamy cadences. It was a situation such as St. Evrémonde had read of in French translations

of English romances, and it was entirely to his taste. He had delightful powers of conversation when he chose to exert himself, and this was the sort of occasion which called them forth. The young English lady was more than pretty—she was absolutely lovely to-night, and she was original and interesting. What was more, she was interested in him, and she had risked her life on his behalf. A flattering thought occurred to him. Was she more interested than she seemed? She was very reserved. Of course, all Englishwomen were reserved—that was well known; could it be that under the cloak of her reserve she entertained a warmer feeling than mere interest—was that the explanation of an act of bravery which even for an Englishwoman was extraordinary? But no, no! he dismissed the half-formed idea as he met her frank and unconscious gaze. She was smiling at his remarks, she was pleased by his evident desire to please her, and there was sympathy and liking in her pretty eyes, but nothing more.

St. Evrémonde was enjoying himself, and he was in no hurry to return to the ball-room. Melanie had come in twice, and had glanced in their direction with an expression of amused surprise; but seeing Evangela so well enter-

tained, she had gone away without interrupting. Then Adlofstein passed through on his way to the card-room, and when he saw his cousin's attitude and Evangela's smiling face, he gave a slight start, and the cynical smile which crossed his countenance gave place to a heavier frown than usual.

'He is showing his gratitude,' he thought, 'and he is doing it with a vengeance; but will she understand how much it is worth?'

Adlofstein had betaken himself to the card-room with the intention of taking a hand at taroque; but when he got there he was conscious of a singular sense of restlessness and disquiet, and he made so many blunders and mistakes that he decided that he was not in a mood for play. As soon as he decently could, he withdrew from the game; and then he invented to himself an excuse for returning to the billiard-room. He passed through the Chinese salon again, and this time he saw that Evangela was alone. St. Evrémonde would willingly have prolonged his stay had he been allowed to do so, and as the etiquette of an Austrian ball-room forbids engagements beforehand when there are no programmes, he was hampered by no considerations that would have prevented him; but Evangela's instincts were

much too fine to allow her to be a party to such an indiscretion, and St. Evrémonde had enough tact and *savoir vivre* to know to a moment how long he might linger. He had just left as Adlofstein re-entered the room, and Adlofstein remarked his absence with a feeling of unqualified relief.

'How goes it now?' he asked, marching up to Evangela after a moment's hesitation. 'I can see quite well that you are not at all fit to be in all this racket,' he added, observing the too lovely colour in her cheeks.

'There isn't much racket in here, is there?' said Evangela, smiling, but thinking to herself what a contrast Adlofstein's blunt speech was to the charming manners of his cousin. 'This is a sheltered nook away from the whirl and crush, and one hears the music and sees the fun without heat or fatigue. You are not dancing, are you? Then, won't you sit down, and give me an opportunity of thanking you for the effectual aid you rendered me this afternoon.'

'No,' said Adlofstein, in a tone of disgust. 'I don't want thanks—I detest thanks; and in this case there is nothing to thank for. What I did I should have done for anybody in the same position.'

'Oh, of course!' said Evangela, with a little

laugh of frank amusement that somehow vexed him. 'Of course I know that. And you don't like to be thanked? Well, I think I can understand your objection. Gratitude is such a very inexpressible thing, and you seldom hear it put into words without being reminded of the sickliness of forced or hothouse growths. But your cousin has been expressing his thanks to me, so I thought it was perhaps incumbent upon me to offer mine to you, who certainly deserve them much more.'

'Ah!' said Adlofstein. 'And did St. Evrémonde's effusions appear to you sickly and forced?'

He was searching her face so keenly as he spoke that she felt her colour rise, and, discomposed by this, she blushed hotly as she answered:

'I did not say that, and I certainly do not mean you to infer it. The Latin races seem to have a gift of expressing things gracefully which is denied to our blunter nation. And the Marquis is particularly graceful.'

'He is,' rejoined Adlofstein grimly; 'particularly graceful.'

There was a pause, which Evangela felt to be particularly ungraceful and uncomfortable. Adlofstein had disregarded her invitation to

sit down, and he remained standing before her, blocking out her view of the narrow doorway through which the dancers were to be seen. She glanced up at him once or twice, but he seemed lost in abstraction, and she was beginning to wish that he would go away, when he turned towards her, and spoke again.

'Well,' he said, 'why don't you go on?'

'Go on!' said Evangela. 'What do you mean?'

'Why don't you go on with your praises of St. Evrémonde? You ought to feel interested in him. You saved his life, you know. You surely have noticed more about him than the mere fact that he is graceful?'

'I really don't know that I am called upon to enumerate his virtues to you, who ought to be much better acquainted with them than I can be,' answered Evangela, with a spirit which was born of resentment and annoyance. 'My acquaintance with M. de St. Evrémonde is of the slightest.'

'And yet you have remarked his virtues and perfections, and you must have formed some opinion about him. In Vienna he is considered irresistibly handsome, delightfully witty, and an accomplished flirt. Would you endorse all that?'

'I don't know anything at all about it,' said Evangela, with dignity, 'and I should like to know what you mean by talking to me in this sort of way. Do you wish to prejudice me against your cousin?'

'To prejudice you against him?' said Adlofstein, with a sudden change of tone. 'No—emphatically no! But I think that you ought to know what he is; that you should understand—— Ah! *à propos de bottes*—here he is! We were just discussing your gracefulness, St. Evrémonde.'

St. Evrémonde glanced quickly from his cousin to Evangela, and smiled. From the expression of the two faces, it was easy for him to guess which way the argument had gone, and he addressed himself unperturbed to Evangela.

'They are going to play that waltz of Strauss' that I was telling you about—there it is, just striking up—and I thought I would come and ask you if you felt up to one dance—just one round of the room.'

The Marquis did not think it necessary to mention that he had been to the *Kapell-meister* and secured an alteration in the programme by means of a bribe; but he inwardly congratulated himself upon the happy idea, as he saw

Evangela's slender foot peep out of the pink fluffings at the edge of her gown and begin to beat time to the music. He went on quickly :

'I know you had made up your mind not to dance ; but I thought you might perhaps make an exception in my favour. I owe you so much that I claim to owe you a little more.'

St. Evrémonde was persuasive, and Evangela was so fond of dancing that she was only too ready to be beguiled. She looked up with a sparkle in her eyes that seemed to say that she knew that it would be naughty, but still she would be naughty ; and she had risen from her chair, when she glanced at Adlofstein, and stopped short suddenly. The expression of his countenance gave her quite a shock, his brow was so black, and his eyes so condemning.

'St. Evrémonde,' he said, in low but incisive tones, 'your thoughtlessness is inexcusable—I will not call it by a more severe word. Do you realize all that is involved in persuading Fräulein Wynne to dance with you ? It is not only that, after the frightful strain that she has incurred for your sake this afternoon, it will be a serious risk to her health ; it will give mortal

offence to every man she has refused to dance with, and will make her position here almost impossible.'

'My dear Louis,' replied St. Evrémonde, with imperturbable good-humour, 'you have the most remarkable talent for converting molehills into mountains of any man that I know! But I don't interfere in the management of your molehills, so I expect you to leave me alone to the farming of mine. Of course,' he said, his voice softening as he turned to Evangela, 'if you felt it unwise for any reason, I should not be so selfish as to press you——'

'But I have not refused to dance with anyone,' said Evangela, addressing herself to Adlofstein, and looking eager, though deprecating. 'I have kept out of the way of being asked, and no one has asked me. And as to my health, really I feel so well, and I am longing so for a dance, that I am sure it could not do me any harm—on the contrary, I think it would do me good.'

To the decidedly feminine logic of this argument, Adlofstein had no answer to oppose. He bowed with cold and formal politeness, and Evangela took St. Evrémonde's offered arm and went out with him.

As they passed through the doorway, Adlofstein overheard St. Evrémonde say :

' It does not do to pay too much attention to my cousin's fancies. You know, he really is sometimes quite——' The rest was lost in the buzz of the crowd in the ball-room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE QUEEN OF THE COTILLON.

It was not difficult for Adlofstein to supply from imagination the conclusion of his cousin's speech, and though his lip curled in scornful disdain of anything that St. Evrémonde could do or say against him, the inference did not tend to soothe his ruffled mood. He looked cool enough ; but inwardly he was in one of those devastating rages which shake a man's nature to its foundations, and take away his reason for the time being. As a boy, Adlofstein had been quite ungovernable when he was in a passion ; he had himself been alarmed at the thought of the lengths to which he felt himself capable of being carried, and as he grew up, he had forced himself to acquire a habit of self-control. He never allowed himself to flame out now, and the angrier he felt, the more quiet and collected his manner was apt to become ; but none the

less did he feel the strength of the force within; and it kept him in continual remembrance of the danger into which he might at any moment fall —of the sword that was always hanging over his head.

It was in the consciousness of this stormy temper—so much more violent than anyone but himself knew—that the chief strength of his dread lay. But for that close personal enemy, which he regarded as a symptom of the curse, his fears would probably never have been aroused, and his horror of it was so intense and abiding that he scarcely realized how completely he had learned to subdue it—how strong was the mastery that he had gained over himself. Now, when he was more wildly shaken than he had been at any time since his father's marriage, he had sufficient coolness and self-command to seek to analyze his own feelings, and ask himself why he should be so stirred.

St. Evrémonde's selfish pertinacity was no new discovery to him. He had always recognised it; and had even reckoned it as an integral part of his character—a part which was perhaps indispensable to the sort of success that he was likely to attain. It was not that which filled his soul with such a passion of resentment; it

was not envy of the interest which St. Evrémonde seemed on the way to excite in the young English lady—had he not abjured all interest in her or any other woman himself? And of course it was not the little exhibition of girlish recklessness and wilfulness in Evangela that had been the provocation. What, then, was it? Adlofstein could find no answer, and the conviction that it might be an utterly unreasonable outburst of his private demon came upon him with sobering and depressing force.

'It is unscotched still. It always will be unscotched, I suppose,' he said to himself, 'and it only shows more clearly how likely it is that she is right, and I am wrong, about Bertemilian. All this time I have been trying to convince myself that the old family taint had died out, and that therefore it must have been a duel. Of course, if it was a duel, the hints that the Baroness has let fall would fix it upon Bertemilian without the possibility of a doubt; but she is an awful liar—there probably was no duel at all. Have I not had sufficient evidence of the mischief in myself in the last few months? Do I not feel it now? I would willingly put a bullet through somebody at this moment, and I shouldn't care much who it was—myself or anybody else. Well, I had better

take myself out of the way of those two. I am scarcely in a fit mood to meet them just now.'

He left the Chinese salon, and passed through the dancing-room with a resolute tread and impassive countenance; but as he steered his way through the dancers, he caught sight of St. Evrémonde and Evangela, and he could not help following them with his eyes. They were dancing very smoothly and gracefully. Yes, no doubt St. Evrémonde was graceful—particularly graceful; and so was she. They matched very well, certainly; she was exactly the right height for him, and there was not another couple in the room so striking. St. Evrémonde looked very handsome and happy; he was enjoying himself thoroughly, no doubt, and she—but what was the matter with her? Her roses were gone—her face was as white as death—her steps were failing—she was fainting; and St. Evrémonde had almost to carry her out of the room.

Adlofstein thought no more of returning to the billiard-room. He elbowed his way ruthlessly to the buffet, and he came back to the Chinese salon with a glass of wine in his hand, just as St. Evrémonde laid Evangela back in her chair. The Countess was fluttering over her, and all the other ladies were hurrying

round, anxious to do their best in the utterance of sympathy; but their exclamations of '*Lieber Gott!*' were not effective in the way of aid; and it was not until Evangela had taken some of the wine handed to her that she began to revive at all. When she opened her eyes, and saw St. Evrémonde kneeling at her side, and all the group of pitying faces round her, the colour began to come back to her cheeks fast enough.

'I am so sorry,' she said penitently, as she made an effort to sit up; 'it was very stupid of me. Oh no, M. de St. Evrémonde; it was not in any way your fault—I should think not! It was perhaps a little unwise of me; but there is no harm done. I shall be all right again directly.'

'Oh, my dear, what a pity! The cotillon is just going to begin, and I am afraid now that you will not be able to come in, even to look on!' exclaimed Melanie's voice out of the *mêlée*.

'She ought not to think of it,' observed one of the ladies; but Evangela had no idea of giving up her intention of seeing the cotillon; and as Baron Bertemilian was not in the room, there was no one who had authority to restrain her.

'What is to be done?' said the Countess,

appealing to Adlofstein with a distressed flutter of her thin hands.

He seemed the strongest spirit present, and his disapproval of Evangela's wilfulness was manifest; but there was no help to be had from him.

'There is nothing to be done but to let the young lady have her own way, and suffer the consequences,' he said stiffly. 'I have reason to know that all argument will be totally useless.'

Evangela threw a reproachful glance at him, which was almost pathetic; but she remained quietly persistent, and in the end she got her way.

The cotillon was soon in full swing; and Evangela sat by the Countess at the end of the long salon, watching the pretty and fantastic devices of the *Damenwahl*, and the wonderful figures that the dancers described under the able direction of Count Marcel—the winding circles, the swaying S's, the double and treble chains, the bridges and the mazes. Evangela had never seen anything like it; and she congratulated herself upon her resolution to stay for it. Her interest centred upon Melanie, who had a turn all to herself in the *Damenwahl*. She sat in a chair placed in the middle of the room,

with a white cloth at her feet, which her chosen partner would be allowed to kneel upon, but no one else; and she looked so bewitching as she queened it there, smiling and radiant, that all the men who circled round her were keenly desirous of winning the sign of her preference; but as fast as they tried to kneel upon it, she snatched the cloth away, and they had to get up and move on to an accompaniment of jeers and laughter.

Evangela felt pretty certain beforehand who the favoured person would be; and she was not mistaken. When St. Evrémonde's turn came, he dropped on one knee with a grace and confidence that contrasted favourably with the hurried floppings of the rest, and his confidence was rewarded with success. Melanie was the belle of the evening; and Evangela waited expectantly for the triumph that would be hers when the presentation of bouquets began; but when the time came it brought an unexpected *dénouement*. At the end of the cotillon the bouquets were brought in; and all at once the room seemed turned into a flower-show. Evangela, from her place among the chaperons, was watching the scene with eager interest, when she heard a voice at her side, and, turning her head, saw St. Evrémonde, with a

splendid bouquet of the most delicate and costly hot-house blooms in his hand.

'For the lady to whose heroism I owe so much,' he said, with his most courtly bow. 'Though you are not dancing, I trust you will permit me to offer the only little token that I can.'

Evangela took the flowers, and thanked him with a glance of pleasure before she hid her face in the sweet-scented blossoms. When she looked up, Count Marcel was standing before her also with a bouquet, and he was followed by a whole train of others. It seemed that, fired with a desire to show their appreciation of her exploit that day, all the sportsmen had made up their minds to pay this tribute to the young English 'mees'; and though she was prevented from dancing, they were determined to present their bouquets, all the same.

The triumph, therefore, that evening was for Evangela. She was almost smothered in bouquets, and she had to have two lackeys to carry them out for her. St. Evrémonde attended her to the door.

'I trust you will be entirely restored by to-morrow,' he said earnestly. 'We go out shooting after an early breakfast, at which you will, of course, not think of appearing; but I hope that I shall see you later.'

Evangela made no other response than a startled glance; but in the solitude of her own room, as she sat in her dressing-gown, too weary almost to brush out her hair, she pondered over his tone, which disturbed her more than the words. It was only the Viennese gallantry that Melanie had referred to, no doubt; and he perhaps imagined that he owed some special show of politeness towards her; but Evangela wished he had not spoken in that tone. She recollected the character that Adlofstein had given him — irresistibly handsome, delightfully witty, and an accomplished flirt.

'He need not have considered it necessary to warn me,' she reflected, with a recurrence of the resentment that she had felt at the time. 'My own instinct would have been enough to put me on my guard, even if I did not know Melanie's opinion of him. She has told me that he is a perfect butterfly, upon whom it isn't worth while wasting two thoughts—and yet, does she really despise him as much as that?'

Her meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Melanie herself. There was a rustling of silk and laces at the door, and then it opened softly, and Melanie's bright face peeped in.

'Oh, you are not in bed yet!' she said, coming in with Thekla after her. 'We felt we must come and see how you were, dear, after it all. Was it not delightful? Did you not enjoy it? And oh, my dear, what a success you have had! We are all so proud and pleased; and papa especially is delighted!'

'How many bouquets did you have, Vangela?' asked Thekla curiously. 'What! you have not counted? *Mon Dieu!* There they are—may I look?'

The flowers were all heaped up in a corner of the room, and Thekla pounced upon them, uttering critical exclamations as she counted up the trophies.

'Thirty-nine, forty!' she finished up. 'Actually forty!' turning round. 'Ten more than yours, Melanie!'

'Why, almost everyone must have given,' said Melanie. 'They must have agreed that they would, as a recognition of your heroism, my dear! I am sure you well deserve it. It was splendid, what you did—absolutely splendid; and I never was more proud in my life—when I saw you were safe, that is; before, I was nearly mad with terror. I declare I could have shot that Adlofstein when I saw him standing still while the others were running round; and

I thought he was going to remain like a block to see you perish. But he came out well afterwards, I must admit. That was a splendid leap that he made—I cannot deny that.'

'It is really to him that the whole credit belongs, though nobody seems to see it,' said Evangela. 'It is simply absurd to make me the heroine of the adventure; for what I did would have been of no use without him.'

'It would be difficult to consider him a hero, whatever he did,' remarked Melanie, laughing. 'He is not made for the part.'

'This bouquet is truly heavenly!' exclaimed Thekla, holding up the last of the bunches that she was replacing, and looking at it in a sort of ecstasy. 'Nobody else had one so magnificent. Look what exquisite flowers; all white and all scented, and such a size! and tied up with yards and yards of watered-silk ribbon—such a width and such a richness! *Mon Dieu!* I never saw such a bouquet. Who gave it you, Vangela?'

It was St. Evrémande's offering that she was holding up, and Melanie divined it before Evangela had time to say so.

'Of course that is St. Evrémonde's!' she said. 'I saw that he had one magnificent one, and naturally he would give it to you. It is a

graceful way of showing his gratitude to you for having saved his life ; for, my dear Vangela, you may say what you like about the Baron Adlofstein, St. Evrémondè declares that without you he must have perished, for he could not have held on for a single instant longer.'

Melanie's resignation of a triumph that she had had a right to expect for herself was a generous one, and when the two girls had departed, Evangela thought of it with a strange glow of relief and satisfaction at her heart. She was still sitting lost in thought, with her brush idle in her hand, when the door opened again, and Melanie's golden head came popping in.

'Just one more thing I must ask you, dear,' she said, hanging on to the door-handle, and opening her great brown eyes to their widest extent. 'Did you get a bouquet'—in a stage whisper—'from Adlofstein?'

'No,' said Evangela promptly.

'I thought not,' said Melanie, her expression of eager curiosity changing to one of ineffable disgust. 'Mannerless ruffian!'

'I dare say he would suppose that the substantial fact that he had risked his life to save two people from death to-day might count instead of bouquets, and that sort of thing,' observed Evangela with equanimity.

'Not at all!' retorted Melanie. 'You may argue till the stroke of doom, my dear, you will never convince me. A shabby ruffian, I say—an utter ruffian!'

END OF VOL. I.

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